

THE YARD

BY
H.A.VACHELL



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"QUINNEYS"

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THE YARD



THE YARD

THE YARD ~ A Novel

By *HORACE ANNESLEY VACHELL*

(Author of *THE HILL* ; *QUINNEYS* ; *BROTHERS, &c*).



LONDON: HUTCHINSON & CO.
PATERNOSTER ROW, E.C.

TO MY OLD FRIEND,
SIR GEORGE THURSBY, BART.,
MASTER OF THE NEW FOREST BUCKHOUNDS,
I DEDICATE THIS BOOK.

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THE YARD

THE PROLOGUE

FIFTEEN YEARS AGO

I

As Tom came into the small house half way down the narrow street which leads into the cathedral close he called his wife by name.

“Em’ly.”

There was no answer.

He glanced at his watch. Em’ly might be busy in the kitchen or with the child upstairs. It was supper-time, and the child ought, so he reflected, to be soundly asleep. If he went on shouting the child might awake.

He went softly along a narrow and uncarpeted passage, which had a disagreeable smell of mice. As this odour assailed his nostrils, he frowned and shook his head irritably, murmuring to himself: “Home, sweet home.” A home ought to smell sweet, even if it was a cottage. And passages should be kept free from cobwebs and bits of paper.

“Dirt and disorder,” he growled.

His own appearance was conspicuously neat. Although slightly beneath middle height, he carried himself with dignity as became a man who wore the best cut breeches in Melchester. His features were well modelled. Indeed, his personality had finish—that admirable word. A local magnate said of him: “Young Tom has quality.”

A servant was at work in the kitchen when Tom opened the door. She raised a pale face to his as he asked sharply :

“ Where is the missus ? ”

“ I don’t know.”

The girl spoke nervously. Tom stared at her. He knew more about horses than women, but obviously Phœbe was thin and out of condition. Her voice held querulous inflections.

“ Is she out ? ”

“ ’Course she is.”

This statement provoked annoyance rather than astonishment. Em’ly, of late, had been oftener out than in. She took little interest in the preparation of meals and even less in serving and consuming them. Phœbe had to work single-handed in the kitchen.

“ You look short of corn, my girl.”

She shook her head.

“ I ain’t short o’ work.”

Tom left the kitchen and walked to the dining-room. To his astonishment the table was laid for one.

Staring at a not too clean cloth and ill-polished silver, he muttered to himself, a trick easily acquired by horse-men on pleasant terms with their nags :—

“ Hopped it off to a neighbour without a word to me.”

His eyes brightened as he turned to the sideboard, a handsome piece of furniture. Under the sideboard stood a small mahogany cellaret. From this cool cave of the spirits Tom fished out a bottle of whisky. It was half full. Then, in the act of helping himself, he paused. Conviction came to him that Em’ly had been drinking whisky. He knew just how much whisky ought to be in the bottle, because he had decided only the night before that the supply would last out the week. Phœbe happened to be a total abstainer.

Tom sat down and filled his pipe, asking himself some disagreeable questions. Had he encouraged

Em'ly to drink whisky? Or had she been entertaining a gentleman friend who drank whisky? And, if so, who was he? It was certain that the first question could be answered in the negative. He hated to see women drinking spirits. Em'ly liked a glass of port, now and then, but whisky——!

He decided that some man, possibly a customer of his own, had called at the house. Em'ly had offered him a drink. And yet, back of his mind, lingered the fear that Em'ly had "binged herself up." This apprehension prevented him from having a drink. He put away the whisky bottle, murmuring: "Cut it out! Cut it out!"

He returned to the kitchen.

"Anybody been here this afternoon?"

"No caller for you."

"Table is laid for one."

"Is it? I didn't lay it."

Realizing that Phoebe was not in a "chatty" mood, Tom ascended the stairs. He was very proud of his "kid," partly because the neighbours assured him that *she* took after *him*. This might or might not be so. The gossips liked to flatter a young father. In his heart Tom hoped that little Margie was "the goods." She was now four years old, and she had her sire's seat on a tiny rocking horse. She cooed at the best in his stable; she kissed soft muzzles.

He liked to watch her when asleep, a curly head tucked into a plump arm.

His first glance on passing the threshold of the nuptial chamber was reassuring. Margie lay in her cot sound asleep, delicately flushed, a nice fat baby girl. A fond father smiled at her. The smile vanished as he saw half a dozen drawers pulled out and empty. Upon the carpet lay odds and ends of feminine apparel, discarded garments torn and soiled.

"Gosh!"

Em'ly had flitted.

Where ?

A roving eye noticed a note pinned to the pincushion. Young Tom was in no great hurry to read it. He had found similar hastily scrawled billets in the same place and they had not been love billets. Em'ly, no doubt, had taken a notion to spend a few days with a friend. She had many friends and relations in and about Melchester. Long before Margie's arrival in this sinful world, Tom had apostrophized Em'ly as "flighty." He had known her to be a butterfly when he gave chase and captured her.

"Fed up!" was his first comment.

It exasperated him that she should be fed up. He had to work hard at a business that exacted constant attention. He was with horses or on horses all day long. He had supposed that his wife would take pride and pleasure in the house which they had selected together. Someway—she didn't. She liked gadding about, poking her nose over bargain counters and exchanging lively talk with counter-jumpers. When the baby came, she had regarded it as a conversational asset. Strangers stopped to admire it. Baby's promenade in a lovely pram beguiled Em'ly from household duties. Later on Baby had been left at home. Baby had become somewhat of a bore!

All this the husband resented. He knew, also, that protest would be futile. Em'ly was Em'ly. She had certain agreeable qualities. An ardent lover had described her as "sunshiny." Her laugh tinkled delightfully. Nobody could be more pleasant when she had her own way.

Before reading the note on the pincushion, Tom bent over Margie's cot; he touched a dimple in a blooming cheek; he pulled up a crumpled sheet and smoothed it. He had walked the floor with Margie when she suffered from colic or teeth-cutting. Em'ly exercised no such

solicitude. In her considered judgment infants howled themselves to sleep if left judiciously alone. Young Tom didn't see eye to eye with Em'ly over this, but he had to admit that Margie responded to Spartan treatment. When Em'ly popped her into her cot, Margie fell asleep and did not disturb the domestic peace. She had been trained, moreover, to amuse herself when awake in a small foolproof enclosure advertised in the public press as "the busy mother's kindergarten."

Young Tom washed his hands and brushed his hair, reflecting the while that he could "do" without Em'ly's society for a day or two. He hoped that she had gone to her father's farm. But in that case she would have taken the child with her. Urban friends preferred Em'ly without Margie.

He read the note.

Dear Tom—I can't stick it any longer. I hate to say it, but I don't believe you ever loved me really and truly, and I'm afraid I didn't love you. Anyway I've found somebody who does love me as I want to be loved. He is taking me away from this dull old town. Don't make a ridiculous fuss. What's the use? Let's be sensible. It's a comfort to think you'll be good to the kid. You love her more than you do me.—Yours no longer,

EMILY.

II

For a time he was too dazed to think coherently. The blow was overwhelming. And it came upon him with cumulative intensity, because he happened to be sorely worried over his business. He had been unlucky with his horses. That, unquestionably, had affected Em'ly. She had felt the mean pinch of adversity . . .

He sat on the bed, huddled up, with a hot face between cold hands. All the blood in his body seemed to have rushed to his head.

She had bolted !

With whom ?

He dragged himself, half paralysed, to the head of the stairs. He could see Phœbe's pale face. The girl, not a bad sort, knew or suspected something. Her manner had betrayed her ; he had detected a quaver in her voice. He intended to wring the truth out of her after a visit to the dining-room.

He tip-toed down creaking stairs.

He gulped down some whisky.

By the time he entered the kitchen he had gained temporary mastery over his emotions. Quality shows itself in emergencies and exigencies. Young Tom possessed a hot quick temper. A fine horseman had learned to control it. When he addressed the servant maid, he spoke coolly :

" Your mistress has left me."

Phœbe nodded miserably.

" You know all about it, do you ? "

" I—I seen the trouble coming."

Without much difficulty, the sordid facts were elicited. Em'ly had bolted with a bagman, a stranger to the husband. It was he who had drunk the whisky and carried downstairs Em'ly's box. The pair had driven off together to the station. Phœbe didn't know the fellow's name. Terrified by the expression upon her master's face, she stammered out :

" I thinks I can prescribe him."

But her description of the man conveyed nothing to Tom beyond the assertion that he was good-looking.

" A fine figger of a man, I must say."

Tom thanked her curtly and went back to the dining-room.

Here the first encounter between what was best and worst in him took place. He glared at the bottle of whisky. In his mouth was that hot bitter taste which can be traced to violent disturbance of the physical

system. He became horribly thirsty. He was tempted to put the bottle to his mouth and drain it. He wanted to drink himself senseless.

From above the sideboard an enlarged photograph of Em'ly smiled derisively at him. It had been taken shortly after their wedding by a good local photographer. Very few persons can wax enthusiastic over enlarged photographs, but this happened to be an exception. It had charm, quite apart from the likeness; it suggested a maid of Arcadia, a nymph of the fields and woods. Here was a creature of soft curves, smiling joyously, fresh as morning dew—Euphrosyne. A hypercritic might have detected in the too full lips a hint that sensuousness may change into sensuality; a cynic, possibly, would have predicted that the enchanting curves of maidenhood might grow into the less pleasing rotundities of a matron; a trained physiognomist could have seen indications of hardness in eyes too boldly wide open, in a chin cocked at a defiant angle.

Young Tom jumped upon a chair, tore down the heavily framed portrait and smashed it. He hurled it on to the floor and stamped upon it . . .

This act of violence further inflamed him. He picked up a chair always used by Em'ly and smashed that, forgetting that the child was sleeping in the room just overhead.

As he was raising the bottle of whisky to his lips, he heard a cry:

“Mummy—!”

He put down the bottle, listening.

The cry was repeated. He decided that Margie must be frightened. She had been awakened by the noise below. At this critical moment a dreadful thought gripped him. Was she his child?

He rushed upstairs.

Margie was standing up in her cot, wailing. At sight of Tom, she smiled and held out her arms. Tom stood

still, staring at her. The child's face puckered, because she had been slapped soundly by Em'ly upon similar occasions.

"Don't cry!"

The injunction came sharply. Margie's smile had reminded the man of the wanton mother, but her frown, oddly enough, established paternity. In an old album in the parlour was a tin-type of Young Tom taken at the same ripe age of four, taken, too, at a moment when the youngster was out of temper because a large sweet had been removed from his mouth by a fond mother. He could remember the incident perfectly. His mother had said: "Be a little man and smile." With the perversity of childhood, he had frowned.

"She is mine" he decided swiftly.

His features softened, as he took Margie into his arms and sat down. But he was too distracted by conflicting emotions to speak. The child spoke first.

"Where's my mummy?"

"Gone away!"

Words to all of us have particular and peculiar values. Unwittingly, Tom had used an expression pat to the lip of a foxhunter and beloved by him. Young Tom had hunted foxes since he was five years old. The two ringing words recalled vividly keen excitements, the end of exasperating delays, the beginning of fresh adventures, the tightening of nerves and tissues.

Margie repeated the phrase, articulately.

"Yes," said Tom; "she has left us, baby."

She admonished him gravely:

"You mustn't call me baby."

This had been agreed between them some weeks previously. Expecting a handsome apology and not receiving it, the child went on gravely:

"Naughty daddy to call me baby."

He hugged her to him.

"You are my baby," he whispered.

"When is mummy coming back?"

"I don't know, dear. I'm going to pop you into your cot."

She laid her cheek against his.

"If mummy isn't coming back to-night, may I sleep with you?"

"I don't see why you shouldn't. Will you go to by-bye if I put you into the big bed now?"

"Yes."

III

He sat beside the big bed till the child fell asleep. When he reached the dining-room the bitter taste was out of his mouth. Phoebe brought in his supper. He could see that she had been crying, which affected him oddly, because he had not treated her too kindly. Inefficiency irritated him. To cheer her up, he said thickly:

"It's a riddance of rubbish."

"It's so awful. You was good to 'er."

"Um."

"And livin' so close to the cathedral. But mother said to me only las' Sunday: 'There's a heap of immortality,' she says, 'in these old towns, so you mind who you walks out with.'"

"And do you?"

"Yus—I do. I'm ever so sorry you hasn't a nicer supper."

"Gosh! This isn't the time for eating."

"May be not. Whatever are you goin' to do?"

"I don't know yet," he replied grimly. "You won't run about yapping, will you?"

"Not me."

He slipped a couple of sovereigns into a not too clean hand.

"But I hate, indeed I do, to take money for that."

"You take it. It isn't only for *that*. As between

our two selves, my girl, it's because your eyes are red."

Her cheeks were red too, as she hurried out of the room. He heard her sniffing as she went down the passage.

"Good girls in the world," he thought. "Why did I pick a wrong 'un?"

Cold mutton failed to allure him. Everything else had been brought in—a cheese, a bit of gammon of bacon, and three tartlets. These tartlets challenged attention. Poor Phœbe had no "hand" for light pastry. Similar tartlets had provoked harsh criticism from Em'ly. And, at the time, feeling sorry for misdirected effort, Young Tom had lied generously. The absurd incident came back startlingly, the more so because it illuminated sharp facets in a pretty, petulant wife, who could make light pastry herself if she chose, having, perhaps, an affinity with it. She rated the unfortunate "slavey" in the presence of Tom. Whereupon he had said mendaciously: "I like Phœbe's tartlets." And then he had mortified the flesh by eating two!

Overworked, unhappy at circumstances which she was unable to control, the girl had made these tartlets for him.

Tom felt strangely moved.

He took two of the three tartlets, carried them into the cat-walk, which was called, euphemistically, the "garden" and buried them!

The recording angel, it is to be hoped, made a note of this funeral.

Tom smoked many pipes, but the whisky bottle was left, half full, in the cellaret. It would be fatuous to assert that a sense of humour saved the situation. Possibly it alleviated it. Phœbe's misuse of the wonderful word "immortality" brought a derisive grin to Tom's lips. It was part of the disconcerting everlastingness of sin that brought home to him the essential fact——

He had walked out with the wrong girl.

Her people were all right. Looking back, he had to admit that "strain" counted with him. He had wooed a farmer's daughter, a farmer's sister. He came of farmers' stock. He loved the land, the jolly green earth. . . .

A "vixen" had "gone away."

He was unable, of course, to view himself or "her" with detachment. Pride, not love, lay quivering in the dust. Already he could hear the yapping. Gentle and simple would throw their tongues. . . .

Upon the carpet lay the shattered chair and portrait. Phœbe had not dared to remove them. Tom looked at the wreckage furtively. He had wanted to smash Em'ly; he had seen red. This was no longer the predominant colour.

"Rubbish heap," he growled.

He carried the wreckage into the cat-walk and burned it not far from the spot where the tartlets were laid to rest. Standing between grave and pyre he surveyed his small house and the houses on each side of it. The tag—"cribbed, cabined and confined" did not occur to him, but it would have expressed adequately enough his feelings.

"Must cut loose," he murmured.

A May sun was declining into the west. He could smell lilac blooming in the next garden, which was not a cat-walk. The fragrance of it reminded him of the May day, five years before, when Em'ly and he had decided to take the house. He had said to her: "You will look after the garden." She had replied prettily: "I shall just love doing it."

Nothing had been done in five years.

"Never was home to her."

Still talking to himself the poor fellow returned to the house that had never been home to him. Phœbe had cleared away the uneaten supper. She was singing a

hymn in the kitchen, perhaps designedly. She had selected one familiar to Tom from childhood. Em'ly and he had sung it together out of the same hymn book, squeezing each other's fingers :

O Paradise, O Paradise !
Who does not crave for thee.

As a boy he had disdained the sugary sentimentality of this particular hymn. He had craved for earthly joys. Phœbe's thin soprano, not too loud, irritated him beyond endurance.

"Damn the girl ! Damn everything !"

Nevertheless, the tartlets which she had made for him with hot, heavy hands kept him from rushing into the kitchen. He considered her feelings. She was attempting to console him.

He sat on till midnight, smoking and thinking. Em'ly had counselled the exercise of common sense. A fool would follow a baggage and make a fuss.

"Picked a loser, I did. Better own up to it."

A bagman and a baggage—two of a kind !

Gradually and inevitably, rage against a false wife became rage against a false mother. Em'ly had abandoned her child. This unnatural crime roused him to fresh fury. She deserved to be killed for that.

"Pig !"

He shook his fist at the empty space above the sideboard. It was the worst epithet he could apply to her. Pigs ate their young.

With desperate resolution he put Em'ly from him. Before he went upstairs he had decided to leave Melchester, to begin again somewhere else. He might, had he thought of it, apostrophized Em'ly as "rat," inasmuch as the ship which carried his fortunes was in danger of foundering. Dealing in horses is at best a very speculative business. Tom's father had made money in Melchester and lost it on the turf. The son

had succeeded to little more than a "connection." Since the old man's death ill luck had dogged his son. Possibly a young man had been "venturesome." More than once Em'ly "threw it up to him" that he was too honest. He had bought sound horses instead of "screws" and sold them at a modest profit. That was his "policy." A big prosperous business couldn't be built up on small, niggardly lines. Bad debts, too, had impoverished him. Before despatching Em'ly to the limbo of forgetfulness, he wondered whether the bagman had dangled before her the lure of "cash in hand." Some gentlemen of the road were rich.

He found Margie fast asleep in the middle of the big bed. Once more he examined her tiny features one by one. The likeness to the cross little boy of the tin-type had vanished. Rosy cheeks, a delicate skin, evoked poignant memories of Em'ly.

"One can't be sure," he muttered.

Then, suddenly, he caught sight of her left hand, lying palm down upon the pillow. The little finger was not perfectly straight. Never had he noticed that before. The little finger of his own left hand exhibited the same deflection.

He kissed the child's finger.

Still staring at her, he wished that she was a boy. But this wish diminished in intensity as he looked round the room. Em'ly's discarded garments had mysteriously disappeared.

Phœbe had removed them.

This crowning act of consideration for a stricken man upon the part of an ignorant girl hardly out of her teens impressed Tom as amazing. It provoked a loud "Gosh" that might easily have disturbed seraphic slumbers.

"Must make the best of Margie," he reflected.

And he lay awake half that miserable night wondering how he could do it.

IV

Margie woke early and insisted upon being cuddled. Later on, when Tom, not for the first time, was washing her face and trying to keep the soap out of her eyes, she remembered her mother.

"I love you better than mummy."

"Why?"

"It's a secret."

"Tell it."

"But you'll tell mummy."

"Not me."

"I'll whisper it."

Tom inclined an attentive ear.

"Sometimes, mummy 'panks a baby too hard."

"Ho! Now I'll tell you something. Your mummy isn't going to spank you any more. You take that from me for keeps. If need be I'll do the spanking. See?"

She nodded at him.

"You won't hurt me much," she declared confidently.

CHAPTER I

THE YARD

I

THE YARD belonged to Tom Kinsman, the Puddenhurst horse dealer. Beside a high white gate a large sign informed strangers to the Forest of Ys that hunters were for sale and on hire. Peeping through the gate or over it the same strangers were likely to be favourably impressed by the sight of three rows of loose boxes admirably built. On fine days heads of hunters advertised themselves, inviting closer acquaintance. On Sundays, dark blue buckets, with T.K. in white lettering, arrested attention. The Yard, in fine, looked (and was) spick and span. It is significant that the horses with rare exceptions did not lay back their ears when visitors approached them. Some whinnied, expecting sugar and caresses. It might be inferred that Tom Kinsman was a first-rate horse master, insisting upon kindness of treatment. Brutality affects horses as disastrously as bad forage. Tom Kinsman dealt drastically with rough strappers.

Hard by the gate stood the office, a comfortable room, warm in winter and cool in summer. Portraits of hunters and hounds embellished the walls. In pre-war days, a certain artist had hunted with buck hounds and fox hounds. He loved horses and hounds and he loved too well a good bottle of wine. Tom had mounted him, season after season, receiving in return not cheques (which would have been dishonoured), but canvasses,

which—after the death of the painter—increased in value. Tom would point to them, saying :

“ A rare investment. No complaints ! ”

These portraits were regarded by the dealer as tests. Would-be hirers of hunters were invited to criticize them *not* as works of art. A young gentleman, in the “ hossiest ” of togs, might betray himself as a novice with one ill-considered remark, because the painter had been an equine anatomist who disdained camouflage. Perfections and imperfections were portrayed with scrupulous fidelity. If a stout stranger happened to remark : “ That nag is a bit too light in bone for me,” Tom Kinsman would take him round the loose boxes. If, on the other hand, ignorance revealed itself, Tom summoned his nagsman, the head lad of a dealer’s establishment. The nagsman understood that something slow, sure and not too valuable was required.

Upon a windy afternoon at the end of March, a visitor to Puddenhurst read the sign and looked over the gate into The Yard. He was a man about thirty, wearing a blue serge suit with a tang of the sea about it. He had neither the legs nor the appearance of a horseman. A jolly, clean-shaven countenance surmounted broad shoulders. Biceps and deltoid muscles were well developed. Mr. Rodney Selwin had commanded a destroyer at Zeebrugge, but now he was an authorized clerk on the Stock Exchange, knowing more about bulls and bears than horses.

He passed through the gate, nodded approvingly at the general neatness of The Yard, and addressed a strapper :

“ Is Mr. Kinsman here ? ”

The strapper indicated the office.

“ You’ll find the guv’nor in there, sir.”

Selwin pulled a letter from his pocket, as he passed through the open door. Tom received him genially, liking the cut of the sailor’s jib. Roddy, as his friends

called him, smiled pleasantly at the dealer. He beheld a small thin wiry "customer," wearing wonderful breeches and leggings. Out of a sun-and-wind-tanned face sparkled a pair of steel blue eyes.

"Very wide-awake cove," thought Roddy, as he presented his letter of introduction. Tom read it at once :

Dear Tom—This will introduce Commander Selwin, a particular pal of mine, who wants a hunt in our forest. Find him the right conveyance.—Yours truly,
HENRY SLUFTER.

"Sit down, Commander," said Tom. "Any friend of the Captain's is welcome."

"I don't call myself Commander," said Roddy modestly.

He sat down and looked about him, not with the eye of a connoisseur, but his glance lingered upon Tom's nether garments. Tom tapped the letter.

"The Captain says I'm to find you the right conveyance."

"For the day after to-morrow."

"Um!" murmured the dealer, slightly puzzled. Sailors, in his experience, might be thrusters on the high seas and in the hunting field. Courage was their inalienable characteristic and, too often—recklessness.

"Anything you fancy on these walls?" asked Tom.

Roddy surveyed the gallery. As a particular pal of Captain Slufter—and owning a retentive memory—he could recall certain expressions.

"A very tidy lot," he said coolly.

This was satisfactory as far as it went. With a disarming smile Roddy continued :

"I put myself unreservedly into your hands, Mr. Kinsman."

"You don't want to buy a horse?"

"Not now. If I hunt here next season——"

Tom jumped up.

"Come and have a squint at 'em," he suggested. "We've all sorts and all sizes, young 'uns and old 'uns."

Roddy followed the dealer across the yard. He was attempting to dissemble ignorance of horseflesh and not feeling as cool as he looked. He had ridden ponies and mules in many parts of the world, but what he knew about hunters could have been enclosed in a grain of millet seed. To appear in the hunting field for the first time seemed to him a notable adventure. Love of the chase animated him as will appear presently.

Several horses were stripped.

Having nothing to say about them, Roddy held his tongue, thereby drawing a herring across his track. Tom Kinsman exhibited humbler wares first. He began, indeed, with the hacks hired to non-hunting visitors. When Roddy surveyed them silently Tom made certain that silence indicated disapproval. He said, apologetically :

"I don't put my biggest strawberries on top o' the basket."

Roddy nodded. Slightly piqued, the dealer missed out a box or two.

"I'll show you Timbuctoo."

"Do," said Roddy. A sense of humour told him that silence had served its purpose. He would be expected to praise Timbuctoo. Somehow a novice divined that Timbuctoo was a big strawberry.

"An Irishman, Mr. Kinsman?"

"A topper," said the dealer.

Timbuctoo was stripped.

"I like that horse," said Roddy.

Tom grinned. The right sort did like Timbuctoo. He was fired all round, long past mark of mouth, but a gentleman from ears to fetlocks.

"Intelligent eye," remarked Roddy. He continued

agreeably : " If he's a hireling, Mr. Kinsman, I'll have him."

" Right," said Tom. He was pleased with Captain Slufter's particular pal, because he had made up his mind the moment he was shown a hunter. And Tom supposed that any friend of the Captain's could ride a bit. Timbuctoo was not a mug's horse.

Dealer and customer returned to the office, where Roddy accepted a cigar. All arrangements were noted down. Timbuctoo would be sent on to the meet. At the last minute, as Roddy was leaving The Yard doubt assailed Tom Kinsman. A novice gave himself away. Tom had said carelessly : " Timbuctoo likes to get his nose near hounds." Whereupon a gallant sailor had replied valiantly : " The nearer the better, bang in the middle of 'em—if he likes."

" Not quite so near as that, sir, if the master's feelings are to be considered."

He glanced sharply at Roddy upon whose ingenuous countenance was inscribed ignorance of the dealer's observation.

As Roddy was walking through the gate, Tom Kinsman called up the nagsman.

" I've made a mistake, Bert."

" 'Ave yer, guv'nor ? "

" Yes. I make no doubt that Commander Selwin can ride the storm, but I don't think he can ride Timbuctoo."

II

Two days later, upon the eventful morning when Roddy Selwin was to make his first appearance in the hunting field, we find Tom Kinsman in a black temper.

Everybody in The Yard knew this, and knowing also the cause of the atrabiliary disturbance chuckled. The " guv'nor " had been had. Strappers winked at each other. Even the nagsman, once stud groom to a

nobleman, relaxed features that had been compared, unfavourably, with those of the mandril at the Zoo.

Some five months before, Tom had bought a blood mare at Tattersalls. He bought her on her looks, although for a thoroughbred she was a thought heavy in the ear, and he liked the way she moved. Somebody—Tom failed afterwards to recall the name of his informant—assured the dealer that a child could ride the mare sitting face to the tail. Tom accepted this assurance for what it was worth. Incidentally, it may be mentioned that he had lunched well. Anyway he bought the animal for fifty pounds with the intention of hiring her out to some lady of quality who might demand a smart mount for the Spring hunting in the Forest of Ys. Notable horsewomen came to Puddenhurst for the spring hunting. If they fancied a hireling, they would pay a fair price for it with a view to taking it down to Exmoor later on. Failing that, Tom never doubted that he could sell a handsome mover at his big May sale.

The mare came down to Puddenhurst next day.

Tom and his daughter Margery had a squint at her as she stood, stripped, in her loose box. The mare beamed placidly at them.

"Ain't she a darling, hay?"

Miss Kinsman nodded.

"Not a bad name for her," was the young woman's comment.

"Six years old, good manners, sound," said Tom. "And a child can ride her sitting face to the tail." He turned to an obsequious strapper.

"Let's see her run," he commanded.

The mare arched a glossy neck as a halter was slipped on. The gravel in the yard was hard and smooth. She trotted up and down. Tom smiled.

"I don't have to look at her," he affirmed. "My ears tell me what she is."

"Ve—ry nice bit o' stuff," murmured the nagsman.

Tom nodded. He was not looking at the mare; he had his eye, both eyes on a customer from the Shires who would give gladly a hundred and fifty for a young horse with breeding and manners.

"Slip your leg over her, Bert."

Bert disappeared to fetch a saddle and bridle. Miss Kinsman patted the darling, and ran her fingers down legs as clean as a deer's. Tom lowered his voice:

"You can take her to the meet to-morrow. Find out how she shapes amongst trees. I'll wager a guinea that she's quick and clever as a cat—born with five legs, she was."

"Looks like it, I must say," agreed Margery.

"Nobody shall ride her," continued a fond and proud father, "till you get her Forest-wise. It'll be a fair treat to see you on her. Between our two selves, Missy, she's as good as sold this minute."

Bert slipped a leg over her. But, somehow, he didn't land in the saddle but behind it. The darling bucked. Bert fell upon his head on the off side. The darling stood still, looking as guileless as a Bolshevik at a peace conference.

"You clumsy fool!" exclaimed Tom.

Bert rubbed his head and mumbled something which need not be recorded. Tom improved the occasion.

"That's the way *not* to do it. She wasn't bred to carry a sack of potatoes. You'd give a rocking horse mad staggers, you would."

So speaking, the autocrat of The Yard slipped his leg over the darling with precisely the same result. The mare, apparently, held strong views upon the conservation of energy. In the language of the ring, she side-stepped. Tom found himself behind the cantle. The darling disdained to buck twice. With a minimum of effort she got rid of Tom and stood still.

"Are you hurt, daddy?" asked Margery.

"Never felt better in my life," replied Tom. "Fetch a cutting whip."

"Let me have a go," urged the daughter.

Tom thrust out an aggressive jaw.

"After I've taken the nonsense out of her. Two of you lads hold her head. Don't let go till I give the word."

But they did. And who can blame them? As Tom touched the pigskin the darling bounded about six feet into the ambient air. Tom sat tight. Then he set about her. It was agreed afterwards by the staff that he "done his damndest." The darling attempted to rush back into her loose box, in the hope, possibly, of fracturing her rider's skull. Baulked in this, she tried to grind her owner's knee against a brick wall. Ultimately, she galloped at the yard gate, struck it hard and went head over heels on to the tar-mac of the king's highway. Tom suffered a slight concussion, nothing serious; the darling blinked at him and was led back, unprotesting, to her box.

Father and daughter moved towards the house. Margery knew her father too well to offer an arm, but, as they passed the dining-room she refused to bring him a whisky and soda.

"If you are not concussed you ought to be."

Tom staggered into the parlour and sat down in an armchair. Margery examined his head and suggested 'phoning for the doctor.

"I can vet myself," growled Tom.

Nevertheless he gazed lovingly at Margery, and allowed her to minister to him with hot fomentations. In the yard the guv'nor was spoken of (behind his back) as Hot Fomentations.

Presently he was allowed to slake his thirst with some barley water. As he drained his glass he murmured articulately:

"Seven times nine is forty-nine."

Margery made sure that he was "concussed," but Tom explained himself :

"And seven times eight is fifty-six. Lordy ! Lordy ! as a boy I'd mix those two up something chronic. My headpiece is quite all right, Missy. Might have broken my neck, too, but I tucked my head in as we came down—and rolled. Mare just missed me. What a customer, hay ? "

"Not a safe conveyance, daddy."

"Far from it. And I'm the last man in the world to sell her or hire her out as such. I could starve the baggage into better behaviour, and it's consoling to think that I'm not the only fool in the forest. But I've got my character to keep, although she's lost hers. Fifty of the best ! Dear, dear ! "

"I suppose she wasn't warranted quiet to ride ? "

"No ; she was warranted sound, and sound she is, damn her ! "

Margery continued the hot fomentations. Tom, as his wits returned to him, harked back to the mare.

"Quiet in the stable. That was enough for me. Rubbed her nose against my sleeve, the hussy ! Fifty Bradburys ! I think I could do with a ham sandwich."

Presently he sent for the nagsman and apologized handsomely for unjust words. Tom had many friends and some enemies, but even his enemies admitted that he was of a jolly disposition. His language at times might have edified and instructed a Thames bargee, and yet it remained a fact that he seldom lost a good servant, because however quick to wrath he was equally quick to a quaint repentance afterwards. "A just beast ! " as was said of a greater man.

"I was too hasty, Bert."

"I quite understand, guv'nor."

"You have a wet, my lad. Whatever are we going to do with her, hay ? "

"She'll kill somebody, she will."

"That's right. And Tom Kinsman'll be no party to murder. I've built up my reputation by honest dealing. She'll have to go as a brood mare to some tomfool who doesn't know a brood mare from a broody hen."

The nagsman assented mournfully, adding as an afterthought :

"Passed the vet, you said ? "

"No, I didn't. What do I want with a vet ? The seller warranted her sound. You find something wrong with her, and back she goes to London town."

The nagsman swallowed his ale, and withdrew thoughtfully. Tom would remain—so Miss Kinsman informed him—a prisoner in his parlour till after the midday meal. The nagsman returned to the darling, who appeared pleased to see him. He eyed her meditatively, thinking of certain tricks of the trade. Unhappily, veterinary surgeons possess eyes trained to detect such tricks. A sharp blow with a hammer upon the frog may bring about temporary unsoundness likely to deceive a novice. . . .

Bert shook his head.

He had come to the conclusion that the guv'nor was out o' luck. The season had been dry. Hirelings had eaten their heads off in August and September because the ground was too hard for the buck hounds. And then when cubbing began the same hirelings went lame—one after the other !

"Bad biz, Bert."

Margery had joined him.

"Yes, Miss."

Bert spoke curtly to most young women, but his voice softened when he addressed his employer's daughter, whom he acclaimed as the "right sort." She could wear her riding togs with distinction. Bert disdained stout land girls in breeches and gaiters, speaking of them generically as "cow-'ocked busters."

Margery's legs were slender and straight. Bert described her as a "workman." She possessed "hands." Bert said all that was possible (for him) when he growled out :

"She did ought to have been a boy."

"I'd like one go on her," said Margery lightly.

"Guv'nor'd give me the sack, Miss."

"One go." repeated Margery, "on soft ground, near a bog. I've never seen a horse buck in a bog, have you, Bert?"

Bert's eyes brightened.

"You're a marvel, Miss, you are, indeed."

"We could lead her up to the racecourse," continued Miss Kinsman in beguiling tones. "She leads all right, I suppose?"

"Led her from the station last night. Not a kick in her, follered me like a dawg."

"Let's go up to the racecourse, Bert—*now*."

Finally, compromise was attained. Bert, not Margery, would have another "go." Bert permitted himself one cryptic remark :

"I've known sound 'orses step into bogs, quite casual-like, and come out unsound."

He was grinning as he saddled the darling.

On the northerly side of the racecourse the ground slopes easily to a belt of trees, and between the heather and the trees lies swampy ground. It is not unmistakable bog, but there are boggy places, clay-holes and the like.

They approached the trees. The darling behaved like a lady, but she sniffed warily as she neared the boggy ground.

"Come from Ireland, I'll be bound."

"Sinn Feiner," suggested Margery. "Five bob for you, Bert, if you let me get on first."

"Not if it were never so," Bert replied.

They selected with care the right spot, where the ground was only spongy. Not five yards away sphagnum moss showed itself in patches.

"We'll give 'er something to think about," said Bert, "till I get a proper grip of 'er."

He bent down and filled his right hand with evil smelling mud. Very dexterously he popped the black dose into the darling's mouth. Then he wiped his hand upon her velvety nose. Before the mare recovered from her surprise at this indignity Bert was on her back. Margery stepped smartly to one side, as the darling bounded into the bog.

There were no more bounds.

A chastened animal came out of the bog on the farther side. Bert gave vent to his feelings in a loud "who—whoop!" The mare stood still, trembling and sweating. Bert patted her, and invited her to walk. Margery crossed lower down. As Bert approached at funereal pace, she said sharply:

"Goes a bit short, Bert."

"I hopes so, Miss," replied Bert.

The three returned to the yard. But, before reaching the road, in the sanctuary of the trees, Bert removed with wisps of heather all traces of mud and mire. When he had finished the darling's toilet, he examined her off hock.

"Sound as a bell—I don't think!"

Mr. Sebastian Eddolls, the local vet, came to the same conclusion at three precisely that afternoon. Next day the mare was sent back to Tattersalls, and a regrettable incident appeared to be closed.

Appearances, however, are deceitful. As a proof of this we find Mr. Kinsman in a black temper five months afterwards. He had entered The Yard in high spirits, because business was booming. And only the night before, after dusk, in point of fact, he had brought a deal to a satisfactory finish. Margery accompanied

him, booted and spurred. Her father's injunction still buzzed in her ears :

" I bought a beauty last night. Trotting behind a cart, she was. Never heard a truer trotter. Real music, Missy. A bit rough, of course. Farmer picked her up Cronmouth way. Rising seven, and quiet as a lamb. Just the animal I says to myself for that young sprig of nobility stopping at the " Haunch of Venison " and still suffering from shell-shock. When he sees you on her, she's sold."

" What price, daddy ? "

" Farmer chap asked sixty ; we had a wet together ; I paid forty-three. Captain Shell-shock 'll give a hundred and twenty. That's his figure. For why ? He told me so."

Crossing the yard, father and daughter met Bert. Mr. Kinsman said genially :

" Missy is going to ride that bay mare I bought last night."

" Thought you'd had enough of 'er."

" Hay ? "

" You've bought that beauty which we sent back to Tatts, as unsound, five months ago."

" Not me."

" I spotted 'er by those heavy ears."

Mr. Kinsman groaned.

After a disgusted glance at the darling, he retired to his office, where his daughter and the staff wisely left him alone.

III

As the office door slammed upon Mr. Kinsman, Margery said quietly :

" The guv'nor told me to ride that mare on to the meet."

" Lord love a duck ! " gasped Bert. " You ain't goin' to do it, Miss ? "

"I'm going to try. Looks to me as if she wasn't too full of corn."

"Full o' the devil she is. Once in you can't get the devil out of an 'orse or a woman; and I knows what I knows."

"So do I," said Margery calmly. "Horses have good memories, Bert. We'll take Darling—I've a notion to call her that—on to the racecourse again. And she won't jump into the bog."

Bert looked sulky, but in the end Margery had her way. Darling was led to the soft ground. Margery dropped into the pigskin as lightly as a snowflake falls upon a leaf. Darling trembled and stood still. Margery talked to her and petted her. Presently, very gingerly, like a cat on ice, the mare moved at a walk over the spongy moss and on to the heather. Under pressure of the straightest female legs in Puddenhurst she broke into a trot.

"Gosh!" exclaimed Bert.

Margery pulled up and dismounted. With a gesture she invited the admiring Bert to keep his distance. For a minute or two the young lady fussed over her mount, tightened a girth, loosened the curb chain and cooed like a sucking dove. When she remounted, without Bert's assistance, the mare moved sedately on.

"You're the elastic limit," said Bert.

"I shall take her round the mile," announced Margery.

She did so. When the mare broke into a canter she bucked, but not viciously. Within a minute she was striding on, moving with the long easy swing of the thoroughbred.

"In course," murmured Bert to himself, "she ain't the mare she was six months ago—out o' condition, soft as cheese. Still——!"

It really looked as if the devil was out of her—temporarily.

Margery came back to him, and once more slipped out of the saddle.

"It's like this," she explained. "I don't believe there's more devil in her than there is in me. Devils have been on her, and knocked her about. If you were right, Bert, she'd be a devil in her box, and she isn't. I spotted that five months ago. I shall take her on to the meet and footle about. You can have a bit of a game with the guv'nor. Tell him that I obeyed orders. To calm him down, you can add that I shan't be at the top of the hunt, if there is a hunt. He can expect me home early, about one."

"On a hurdle," muttered Bert uneasily.

"On Darling. I've a hunch that she's going to win a point-to-point."

"With you up, she might," Bert admitted.

We shall follow Margery later on; for the moment we return to The Yard with Bert and invade the privacy of the autocrat.

Tom Kinsman was the son and successor in business of the better-known Joe Kinsman, the Melchester dealer. Joe wore the old-fashioned, low-crowned Derby hat, which quite recently was rediscovered and advertised as something new in headgear. Under the hat shone a clean-shaven face that might have belonged to a well-nourished bishop. Vintage port had mellowed Joe's complexion to the ripe tint and bloom of the wine he loved. Joe bought horses cheap. If he sold dear it was because his son, Tom, rode the best in the stable, and Tom, when notable thrusters found themselves pounded, would pop over some forbidding obstacle after a fashion peculiarly remunerative. On such occasions—one recalls his performance over a brace of high locked railway gates—he would assign credit to his horse: "I was in a rare funk," he might observe, "but Trumpeter cocked his ears and would have it." In the same spirit some son of Croesus would insist upon

"having" Trumpeter, although Tom might assure the young gentleman that if he waited a bit he would secure a hunter more to his liking. Joe's methods were cruder. Being a "card," well aware that he could impose a dominating will upon weaker brethren, he pinned faith to frontal attack. "This *your* horse, sir," he would say with finality. "I know just what *you* want. And mind you—it pays me to suit my customers. Cut and come again."

Many were cut by sharp dealing, but they came again—an amazing tribute to old Joe.

In due time, Joe drank his last bottle, and his funeral was attended by half the county. Portly squires composed an epitaph:

"We've had many a good laugh with old Joe, and many a good gallop."

Tom reigned in his stead for five years. Then he moved to Puddenhurst, that happy village in the heart of Arcadia, dear to lovers of the chase because it is possible to hunt nine months in the year. He might have made more money in the Midlands, but his mother happened to be a Forester, and Tom admitted that he was born with moss on him. It is possible that he had a kindly feeling towards Foresters; it is possible, also, that he inherited from his dam a sense of honesty. Anyway, he set himself to practise what his sire had preached. He tried loyally to "suit" his customers. If a man has hands to deal with a restive horse, he ought to apply similar methods to human beings, for the man who knows horses in all their moods and tenses knows human nature even if outwardly it appears more asinine than equine. Tom, in fine, prospered.

IV

Bert knocked at the office door.

"Come in."

Tom sat in his armchair, glowering at an unlighted fire and smoking his pipe.

"I'm takin' on some 'orses to the meet. Any orders, sir?"

"No. You keep your eye on Timbuctoo."

"Very good, sir."

"Tell the young lady who's riding Scarlet Runner to keep his nose, not his stern, to hounds. That horse don't love hounds, and if I did my duty I'd paint his flag red; and then I'd never sell him."

"Yessir."

"That's about all. Where's Miss Kinsman? Send her along to me."

"Yessir. She 'as gone on, sir."

"Gone—where?"

"To the meet, sir. Your orders."

"My orders?"

"So she said, sir. She told me to tell you that she'd 'footle' about and be 'ome to dinner."

"'Footle' about? On what?"

"On the mare you bought last night."

Tom sprang out of his chair. Bert retreated, apprehending violent assault. The guv'nor was glaring at him, speechless with surprise and rage.

"You let my daughter get on that crazy she-devil?"

"Your daughter does what she's a mind to; she takes after you."

Tom unclenched his fists. He had detected a twinkle in Bert's left eye. Bert delivered a blow over the heart:

"Your daughter can ride that mare; we carn't. Matter o' 'ands."

Tom roared at him:

"Saddle my cob for me. I'm going to the meet. Accessory to murder you are, and if anything happens I'll hang you myself. Hop it!"

Bert hopped it.

V

Tom, growling to himself, buckled on a pair of spurs and took from the rack his heaviest whip. Back of his mind lay the fixed determination to kill the "she-devil" if she inflicted injuries upon his ewe lamb. And, as he jogged out of Puddenhurst, he wondered what the world would hold for him if Margery left it. He had never allowed her to mount a really vicious horse. However, it was some comfort to reflect that the mare stood quietly enough when she had discharged her passenger. Tom could recall other devils that lashed out at prostrate riders with deliberate intent to inflict grievous bodily harm.

Many persons greeted him as he jogged along, but he kept his spurs tickling the flanks of the cob. Salutations were returned gruffly. This was not his custom. Ordinarily, he liked to pass the time of day with all and sundry. Strangers, riding alongside of the dealer, would be astounded at the number of people whom he knew or seemed to know. Far from Puddenhurst, upon the Whitechurch side of the Forest of Ys, Tom might overtake a cart. "Morning, Mr. Batten," he would say cheerily. "How is the missus—and the kids?" If the stranger in his company happened to remark a minute later: "You know everybody, Mr. Kinsman," Tom would roar with laughter. "Never saw him before, never!" When reminded that he had called the driver by name, Tom would confess candidly: "Saw his name on the cart, I did, and those fellows always do have a missus and kids. If you ask after the kiddies out hunting, it pleases 'em, see? Makes 'em friendly to fox 'unting. And often, mind you, it soaps the ways for a deal. They don't know you, but it tickles 'em to think you know them. Human nature!"

Much rain had fallen during the previous week, a heartening fact. Horses and riders seldom came to grief when the Forest was really "wet." Also, his

daughter knew how to "take a toss." Finally, he decided that he was worrying unduly and trotting his faithful cob too fast along a slippery road. As he pulled him into a walk upon the sharp slope of a hill, he muttered :

"Tar-mac puts the fear of God into the best of us."

At this moment, to his relief, he beheld Margery about three hundred yards ahead of him. The "she-devil" was walking quietly.

"Disobedient hussy," thought Tom. "Deserves a wiggling and, by gosh! she'll get it."

Nevertheless righteous wrath evaporated as he marked with pride her slim, erect figure, and her smile, when he overtook her, would have disarmed a sergeant drilling raw recruits.

"Hullo, daddy! I thought you were not coming out to-day."

"Did you? You're not too old to be soundly smacked, my girl."

"Smacked? What for?"

"You know well enough. You've scared the liver and lights out of me, you have. This comes of being too fond a father."

"The mare is quiet enough, isn't she?"

"Because she is half starved. I want no back chat from you. You come along home with me."

"If you're nervous about me, shall we change horses?"

Tom accepted this innocent suggestion as proof of paternity. He remembered "downing" old Joe with the same words.

"You stick to her, if you can," he retorted.

Margery pulled up. The cob stopped of his own initiative.

"You were told," said Margery, "that a child could ride this mare sitting face to the tail. And I believe it's true."

As she spoke, before her astonished sire could protest, she had slipped her feet out of the stirrups, and executed a neat *volte face*. The mare stood still.

"Got a cig. about you, daddy?"

Tom burst out laughing.

"We'll go on to the meet," he said.

CHAPTER II

AT THE MEET

I

IN the Forest of Ys, hunting—whether of red deer, fallow deer, fox or hare—is the touchstone, the Open Sesame to all hearts gentle and simple. Perhaps the simpler the heart the more undivided is its allegiance to the sport of kings. Every child knows that a king met his death in the deep woods near Hernshaw Magna, and visitors from overseas, who have never followed hounds, have been heard to remark that such an end to life in such resplendent surroundings is indeed a royal exit from a too troubled world.

There is no prettier meet than Ockley Pond, although it is some distance from Brockenford and Puddenhurst. Chars-a-bancs are happily absent, and the Laodiceans of the chase give it a “miss.” It is, however, a sure find for a fox, and if he leaves Ockley Wood on a good scenting day followers are sure of a gallop over short heather reasonably free from ruts and rabbit holes.

Hounds and hunt servants were standing near the pond—little bigger than what is called a “splash” in the Forest—when Tom and his daughter rode up. The turf was as velvety and green as a well-kept lawn. Time—old Chronos with his scythe—had mown it for more than a thousand years.

“Six ex-masters of hounds out!” said Tom. “Now, Missy, you do your ‘footling’ away from the pack. Being easier in my mind than I was, I shall attend to biz. Where’s Timbuctoo?”

"Over there, dad, and very playful."

She indicated with her whip a spot where Kinsman's hirelings were in charge of Bert and a couple of lads. Tom approached. The great little man had a weakness. He believed that nobody could adjust a bridle properly, except himself. A throat-latch, for example, was always too loose or too tight. Curb chains provoked scathing comment.

He eyed Timbuctoo affectionately. Tom could have sold the veteran over and over again, but he kept him as an instructor of callow youth. Tom won many prizes in jumping competitions. There was no profit in the game, except as an advertisement, because of the increased costs of transportation and food. More, Tom knew—none better—that prize jumpers over fences made to pattern were likely to come to grief in blind ditches and over timber that did not give way. None the less, the dealer had laid out a jumping school near Puddenhurst, constructed at considerable expense. A young horse could be turned into it, riderless, and learn how to negotiate different fences without risking limbs other than his own. Timbuctoo, also riderless, would show the beginner "how to do it." Hence his value in the eyes of Tom Kinsman.

"Where's the naval hero?" asked Tom of Bert.

The nagsman replied disdainfully:

"Coffee 'ousin' by the road yonder. Sloe gin!"

"Rare tackle too," said Tom genially. "Why, you've put a gag on the old 'un."

"That's right. He takes 'old at first, as you know."

"Here comes Mr. Selwin," said Tom.

Roddy sauntered across the crisp heather.

"Bless my soul!" exclaimed Tom, "he hasn't got on a hat.

"'ats come 'igh these days," murmured Bert.

Roddy, who disdained the stout billycock that has saved many a broken neck, greeted Tom with

enthusiasm. But his "kit" brought a frown to the dealer's brow. Breeches, boots, spurs, coat and scarf were lamentably "wrong" and—significant sign—improperly put on!

"I've got here all right," he announced gaily. "Drove the old 'bus from Westhampton in three quarters of an hour. Left it at a pub in Ockley. I'll leave Timbuctoo at the same pub, Mr. Kinsman."

"Will you?" reflected Tom. "It's more than likely you'll leave Timbuctoo before you've gone half a mile."

Aloud, he said:

"Lost your hat, Commander?"

"Hat? I don't wear a hat. My thatch is thinning. Nothing like fresh air to renew it."

Tom gazed at him sorrowfully. He hadn't time, as he explained afterwards, for a dissertation on premature balditude.

"You told me, *after* you had engaged Timbuctoo to ride to-day, that this was your first go with hounds."

"It is. I'm looking forward to a refreshing experience, Mr. Kinsman."

"You'll get it," thought Tom. "And it won't be sloe gin either." Roddy continued jovially:

"Live and learn, hay?"

Tom nodded.

"We can't learn unless we do live," he observed parenthetically. "I've been thinking that if you want to live, with hounds, I mean, this morning, you'd do better perhaps, to ride my cob."

Roddy looked critically at the cob, fore and aft and amidships.

"I shouldn't have much fun on him, Mr. Kinsman."

"Be—utiful cob!" said Tom. "And handy. Some gentlemen won't ride big horses. Dodging trees now——! He can slip along, too. As for rabbit holes. He'll crawl down one, if you ask him."

" Yes, yes ; but I want to ride Timbuctoo. Every-body rides him, you said."

" He takes his turn with the rest."

" Then why shouldn't I ride him ? "

Tom confessed afterwards that he was " boiled." The hero, with eyes trained to detect remarkable objects in the offing, suddenly saw Margery. Margery was " footling " about at the edge of the heather, amongst gorse bushes. The hero beheld her sailing over a big bunch of furze.

" Isn't that Miss Kinsman ? "

" It is."

" I don't mind riding *her* horse. Looks a bit of all right."

" Looks are deceiving with women and horses. You climb on to Timbuctoo. If he pulls a bit, give him his head. Humour him ! You ain't thinking of taking your own line ? "

" Why not ? " asked the hero.

Tom gasped.

" Why not—— ? Lord love a duck ! You'd be into a bog in two jiffs. You follow that gentleman over there on the bay pony. He knows every inch of the Forest."

" Follow a pony ? "

" If you can. He gets there, he does, unless he rides too cunning. They do say of him that he knows too much. He was master of these hounds once, and a topper, too."

" Was he ? Well, Mr. Kinsman, if I have to engage a pilot I think I'll stick tight as wax to the present master."

" Ride in his pocket—— ! Well, I wouldn't, if I was you. He can throw his tongue. T'other day a stranger caught it proper for riding amongst tail hounds. Master told him to go home. I'm damned if he didn't tell the

master, who's the huntsman, that he, Mr. Stranger, was no nearer tail hounds than the master himself."

"It seems to have been a very just retort," murmured Roddy.

Tom was too petrified to reply.

Within a minute the hero found himself on Timbuctoo's back, and that magnanimous animal, realizing that he was in charge of a novice, behaved delightfully. Tom turned his attention to the lady who was riding Scarlet Runner.

II

The master gave his field a generous quarter of an hour before throwing off. Visitors from the Shires, who subscribed handsomely, were likely to lose their way making short cuts through the Forest. Some of the regular followers might live fifteen miles away. And light held good till nearly seven.

George Tarrant, of Ockley House, stood amongst the hounds talking to the master. Taxation had emptied his loose boxes, but he remained a past authority on the chase. He boasted that he could find a fox anywhere within five miles of his house. And his knowledge of the line that a fox might take under varying conditions was uncanny. Alf, the first whip, hinted that such knowledge indicated black magic. "He don't go to foxes; look, they run to him!" And, sure enough, when the thrusters felt most confident that the field were hopelessly left behind, when some gallant fox had made a five mile point without twisting and ringing, George Tarrant would appear, afoot, conspicuous and cool, ready to give the huntsman vital information.

"Hounds threw up," he would say, "as they crossed that gutter. I think you'll mark him to ground in a small drain near that gate."

And it was so!

Near Tarrant, but mounted on a showy chestnut, was Major Pundle, of Pundle's Green. Of all the families long rooted in the Forest of Ys the Pundles held pride of place as true-blue sportsmen. Old General Pundle, the Major's father, hunted six days a week, and on Sunday afternoons was always to be found at the kennels, inhaling gratefully the odours of that paradise. In his will he left instructions that he was to be buried in a corner of the cemetery, near the track which leads from the kennels to Puddenhurst, in the pious hope that "I may hear the hounds go by." The General belonged to the Whyte-Melville school. When—as he would have put it—he was "broken up," the Foresters admitted unanimously that none would look upon his like again.

The Major, however, was a chip of the old block. He had sired four daughters, whom he spoke of as "the whelps." All of them had been "blooded" before they were seven years old! Their youthful cheeks were encarmined with the ichor of fox and buck by the masters of the respective packs in the august presence of hunt servants and field.

We introduce Diana Pundle, the youngest and prettiest of the whelps.

The irony of Fate imposed upon her the name of the huntress dear to the Ephesians. Far back in the Georgian age, a Pundle of Pundle's Green had sought and found a Diana east of Temple Bar, the only daughter of a "cit." The blushing bride brought a plum to Pundle Green, one hundred thousand pounds! Her father was a goldsmith. General Pundle shook his head when the strain was mentioned, hoping perhaps that it had become attenuated in the "cit's" descendants.

Diana had danced with Roddy Selwin at the Hunt Ball to the jazz strains of Newman's band. In the ballroom the hero was no mean performer. It was Diana, indeed, who had suggested to him a day with the

hounds. We cast back. Roddy happened to be a friend of Captain Slufter, of Hernshaw Parva, who had invited the hero to stay with his people for a couple of dances. After the first dance Roddy lost his head, his heart, and not inconsiderable powers of speech. The Captain realized that the affair was serious.

"You're badly hit, old lad," he observed. "I've been over the top myself, and I know what it is. You can count on me."

"Tell me this," said Roddy, "is there anybody else?"

Harry Slufter reassured him: adding sagaciously: "You've nicked in right. Di has just inherited five thousand thick 'uns from a godmother. In isn't much, of course, but it'll pay for her corn. Fellows will be buzzin' about her before you know where you are."

"I suppose they will."

"Do you ride, Roddy?"

"I have ridden."

"To—hounds?"

Roddy hesitated.

"Not—er—yet. Why?"

Harry became impressive.

"All the Pundles are mad keen about huntin'. We Slufters like a hunt, too, but with us it's not a what-d'you-call-it——?"

"An idiosyncrasy?"

"That's the word. Now, my straight tip is this: if you mean business you must ride into little Di's heart."

Roddy nodded.

"I will."

"If you do, it's a sitter."

"But, strictly speaking, Harry, I'm not at my best on a horse."

"You must talk horse and hound with Di Pundle."

Roddy looked unhappy. He said lugubriously:

"I—I don't think I could."

"I'll lend you Jorrocks and Soapy Sponge. Buy Whyte-Melville's *Riding Reminiscences*.

Roddy promised to do this.

His presence in the hunting field is now explained. Timbuctoo carried him to Diana's side. She smiled upon him graciously, exclaiming :

"You're on Timbuctoo."

"Not a bad gee," said Selwin carelessly.

"One of the best," Diana assured him. "Father says he's the living image of Manifesto."

Roddy was uncomfortably aware that he ought to have heard of Manifesto, even in the ward room, but he hadn't. Diana went on :

"What do you think of my new horse ? "

Roddy stared at Diana's quad, not remarkable except for an ewe neck and a Roman nose.

"Not this one," said Diana. "My new horse. Father is riding it. I had a bit of luck the other day. So father bought that chestnut for me. He needs nagging, and he's a trifle nappy. Father is schooling him. I shall ride him soon."

"Looks a picture ; I say, that Miss Kinsman can ride, can't she ? "

"Our star performer," said Diana heartily. Roddy beamed. He had understood that the ladies of the chase were jealous of each other, quick to "crab" and slow to clap. It was pleasant to think that Diana Pundle was not as some Dianas.

"She rides in the big shows—a marvel ! Born with hands and without nerves."

As she finished speaking Harry Slufter hailed his friend, not too cheerily. Harry, a cavalry officer, set perhaps an inordinate value upon "kit." He eyed a man of the senior service with wrinkled dismay, as he beckoned him aside. Roddy, a better judge of men than breeches, said promptly :

"Anything wrong?"

"Everything, old bean. I never saw such a rag-bag out of the comic papers. Where did you get 'em?"

"I borrowed most of 'em."

"A horseman," said Harry solemnly, "ought to be a credit to his gee. However——! We'll nip up to town together, and I'll see you through. If little Di wasn't the kindest soul on earth she wouldn't speak to you. Hounds will throw up when they see you."

"Is it really as bad as that?"

"You're the worst ever. But cheerio! I'll whisper into Di's shell-like ear that you did borrow your kit on purpose to have a day with her. She'll appreciate the enormous sacrifice you have made. Hounds are moving off. Old Timbuctoo likes to be at the top of a hunt."

"Does he?"

"Of course he does. You sit on his back and admire the scenery; he'll do the rest."

Harry cantered off, after collecting a sovereign from his friend. As a "capper" in a country that had disdained capping in pre-war days his work was cut out for him. Roddy felt forlorn. He might have admired the scenery, but Timbuctoo was "taking hold." Obviously, the veteran meant to push his way through a crowd, sparing neither age nor sex. A testy old gentleman asked the hero where he was going to? And Roddy replied courteously: "I—I don't know." A moment later, he found himself almost on top of a tiny pony. A pert kid bawled at him: "No hurry; we haven't found yet." All this was disconcerting. Timbuctoo's precipitancy indicated lack of intelligence.

"Talk of horse sense," thought Roddy. "Horses haven't got any."

Then, to his relief, the field stood still. Timbuctoo halted with them, cocking his ears, looking for hounds.

The master was drawing up wind. The knowing ones, including the gentleman on the bay pony, had not followed the field into Ockley Wood. If a fox went away up wind, he would probably turn and come back to them.

"Eleu in, bu—oys! Eleu in, my beauties!"

Safely afoot, Roddy would have watched the beauties with interest, but Timbuctoo was betraying signs of impatience. It is a nice point of venery, not yet determined, whether or not horses are influenced by scenting conditions. Hounds, undoubtedly, show indifference when scent is bad. When it is good, long before they hit a line, even the puppies will display zeal and increased activity.

Roddy heard Tom Kinsman's voice:

"How are we getting along, Commander?"

"We are *getting* along," replied Roddy truthfully.

"A rare scenting day, I'm sure. Touch of east in the wind, too. But one never knows. I'd ride that horse on the snaffle, if I were you. There's a gag on it, too."

Roddy blushed through his tan. What was a gag?

"Hark!"

A halloa from a distant whip floated down wind.

"Hoick halloa! Hoick halloa!"

"Fox gone away in the right direction," said Tom. "I'll bet he was lying in the bottom eating beetles and frogs."

"Do foxes eat beetles?"

"Just like shrimps to 'em. You'd better follow me."

What a counsel of perfection!

"Toot—toot—toot," twanged the horn.

The master crossed in front of Roddy at a hand gallop. Problem, a five season hound, had heard the halloa. Her stern dropped as she raced straight to the intoxicating sound. The pack followed her.

Timbuctoo followed the pack.

Roddy tried, in vain, to do two things at once. He wanted to follow Tom ; and he had to dodge the trees. Timbuctoo had left the ride. Hollies and oaks lay in front of him.

To the left Tom was disappearing. At the moment our hero would have sacrificed his medals in exchange for Tom's incomparable seat upon a fat cob. The field was following the master—at a discreet distance.

"Hold hard, you beast !" exclaimed Roddy.

Timbuctoo, with his eyes upon hounds, strode on and on.

"This," thought his rider, "is excess speed."

Very luckily, hounds were running to the right. Otherwise, Roddy would have been amongst them. He might have slain half a dozen at a hundred guineas the couple ! Let us give Timbuctoo credit for galloping well to the left.

A novice crouched and trusted to luck. Branches grazed the small of his back. He went through a holly bush as neatly as the lady in pink tights at a circus goes through a paper hoop ; he was conscious that one knee cap was badly bruised ; he knew that a borrowed pair of breeches had suffered irreparable damage ; a spur—he discovered this afterwards—was missing !

Horse and man debouched upon a small glade.

"Less dirty weather," thought Roddy.

He was not watching hounds, as is enjoined in the text books. Undivided energies were concentrated upon gripping the pommel.

In the middle of the glade was a "splash."

Forest-wise horses gallop through some "splashes," but not all. Timbuctoo may have remembered this "splash," which happened to be deep and full of black mud and water. He stopped on the edge of it. Roddy carried on. He cut a superb voluntary and pitched head first into the "splash."

One minute later, he waded out of it—a piteous object, black as the ace of spades and dripping.

Margery Kinsman was holding Timbuctoo.

III

Roddy apologized.

“I’m a mug, Miss Kinsman.”

Margery replied gravely :

“Everybody rides into splashes, but only mugs ride into the deep splashes twice.”

Roddy would have lifted his hat, if he hadn’t left it at Westhampton.

“Very many thanks,” he murmured.

Margery smiled, not derisively :

“Timbuctoo,” she observed, “is a customer for the first ten minutes ; after that he behaves like a lamb. If you will get on, I’ll guarantee that he’ll mend his manners.”

Roddy mounted.

“Am I,” he asked, “presentable ? ”

“Not for a Royal wedding,” said Margery. “We may catch them up yet.”

Her tone was doubtful. Roddy said incisively :

“You have lost a good hunt on my account.”

“No ; I was going home.”

Roddy hesitated.

It would be satisfactory to record some such answer as this :

“*I am going on.*”

Heroes, in sporting novels, always do go on, and are rewarded with a brush. A sense of humour told our hero that he needed a brush—and a wash-up. It occurred to him that his appearance invited ridicule.

And he was in love.

“My car is at Ockley,” he muttered.

“I will take you to Ockley.”

They walked on—in silence. Roddy may have felt that he might be ranked—by a discriminating critic—as a conscientious objector to the perils of the chase. He said humbly :

“ This is my first hunt, Miss Kinsman.”

“ It won’t be your last ? ”

“ Not much. All the same, I’ve met with my deserts. Your father offered to exchange mounts. Timbuctoo sized me up to rights. I can only say this : Go slow is not a popular motto in the navy. Full speed ahead is asking for trouble in the Forest of Ys.”

Margery qualified this :

“ Full speed on heather. Go slow amongst trees.”

They struck the high road between Puddenhurst and Ringfield, and ascended a hill. Margery pulled up and listened.

“ They have gone left-handed or back. We shall never hear them down wind. A stout dog fox would cross the plain and make for Hollycroft or Basleys.”

“ This,” said Roddy smiling, “ appears to be the moment to admire the scenery.”

The view over the Forest was panoramic, for they were standing upon one of the highest points. In the far distance the huge funnels of a trans-Atlantic liner were sharply outlined against the sky. The boat lay alongside a wharf in Westhampton. Below the moor, on every side of it, were the woodlands. The ancient oaks wore winter’s livery, but the larches, the beeches and the bold ash were putting on the tender, translucent greens of early spring.

“ Arcadia,” murmured Roddy.

There was an inflection of interrogation in his voice. He chose the happy word designedly, wondering whether it would evoke any response from the girl at his side, the girl who looked so like a handsome boy. Had she an eye for anything except a horse ? Probably, knowing nothing of what was outside the Forest of Ys, she was

incapable of appreciating the treasures within it. The daughter of Tom Kinsman could tell him, to a pound, what quantity of oats to give a hunter, as certainly she could appraise its value. What did she know of other values?

"I love the Forest," she said softly.

"Because of the hunting, Miss Kinsman?"

She answered crisply:

"It is difficult to know the Forest unless one hunts. I could take you for a different ride every day of the year. And we should be on grass nearly all the time. You see, I exercise the horses. There's nothing like walking exercise, lots of it. And it isn't dull if one keeps one's eyes open."

"I'm sure you do," he laughed.

"Eyes and ears," she assured him. After a pause, she continued:

"There was a big field out to-day. Most of 'em are blind and deaf. They follow others. Half a dozen followed me, although hounds were running away from me. I had to tell them I was going home."

Roddy felt uneasy. Was she telling the truth? A right good sort might be lying splendidly to spare his feelings. Had she followed him out of compassion for a novice——?

The thought was humiliating.

"On your word of honour were you going home?"

She replied convincingly:

"Of course I was. This mare is out of condition. Father only bought her yesterday, although——"

"Although?"

With quiet chucklings, Margery told the tale of the darling. Roddy was much impressed.

"Is the devil out of her?" he asked.

"Father says she is short of corn. We'll see. I told Bert, our nagsman, that devils had been on her."

"She appreciates the change," said Roddy, heartily.

They moved slowly on, inhaling the south-easterly breeze. Roddy, with the intelligence that distinguishes officers of the senior service, was tempted to ask questions. The girl, obviously, had been well educated. He wondered if she read books other than novels. For the moment he was content to let her choose her own topic.

She elected to talk about hunting. But, being a woman, she made her theme personal to the man.

" You say this is your first hunt, sir ? "

" It is. That jumps to the eye, doesn't it ? "

" You've hired a horse and paid your cap ? "

" I have."

" We might nick in yet. Likely as not the fox will go to ground in Hollycroft or Hentleys. We can gallop across the plain and see. The master is sure to draw Hentleys if he loses his fox. And at this time of year one may find a fox anywhere. What do you say ? "

Roddy said with professional emphasis :

" Full speed ahead ! "

CHAPTER III

FORRARD !

I

ON a fine scenting day, a fox must be a good 'un if he doesn't find himself pressed by hounds when crossing Ockley Plain. But very few people are aware what a magnificent creature a fox is till they examine him with the eyes of an anatomist. We call him "vermin," forsooth ! Tom Smith says of him : " It will be found that no animal has so much muscle in proportion to its size, and the bone, like that of a thoroughbred horse, is like ivory. . . . Notice the width of frame behind the shoulders, which gives so much space for the lungs. . . ."

The fox that left Ockley Wood happened to be a well-seasoned customer, with all the guile of his race. He had left a big cover as soon as hounds entered it. And he had gone up wind with the intention, no doubt, of giving pursuers a taste of his quality. As the gentleman on the bay pony had divined, Master Charley turned down wind after hounds had breasted, at racing pace, the stiff slopes above the wood. His point was Basleys, an enclosure standing by itself on the moor and encompassed by the most treacherous ground in the Forest. To reach the deep earths of Basleys he had to pass through Hollycroft. The gentleman on the bay pony, and those who followed him, had the satisfaction, therefore, a satisfaction not shared by the thrusters, of seeing a fast thing without exhausting their cattle.

" They're slipping along," said the gentleman on the bay pony.

He addressed his remark to Diana Pundle, who alone of all the Pundles had ridden cunning. It is significant, although it passed unnoticed at the time, that Diana, as a child of six, had winced and puckered when she was "blooded." This hint will suffice for the moment.

"I don't see Commander Selwin," said Diana.

"Who is Commander Selwin?" asked the gentleman on the bay pony.

He asked the question indifferently. To a true Forester all strangers, unless they come from the Shires (when they are sure of a welcome), are "foreigners." As such they provoke criticism, which may be just or unjust. If they happen to "settle" in the Forest, they are regarded for thirty years or so as carpet-baggers. At the end of that time they may, possibly, be accepted and recognized on their merits.

Diana said tentatively:

"He did something at Zeebrugge. But he has left the navy."

"Has he?"

"Yes; I think he's a stockbroker, in his father's office: Selwin, Bandycutt & Gannaway."

"Good Lord! Fancy a Selwin—if he is a Selwin—mixing with Bandycutts and Gannaways. You seem to know all about him, Di."

"He's a friend of Harry Slufter's."

"You might have said that before. We had better push on. Gambler, I see, is leading. I walked him."

The Foresters of the right kidney walk puppies, and take the liveliest interest in them. Gambler had been awarded first prize at the Puppy Show two years before. The gentleman on the bay pony could no longer afford to hunt hounds himself, but he watched them at work with all his former keenness.

"We walked Challenger," said Di. "He's just behind Gambler."

"No, he isn't; nowhere near him."

Diana bit her pretty lip, thankful that her sire was half a mile away. He and the other "whelps" would have scoffed at her, reminding her, possibly, that she was harking back to the unmentionable strain of the first Diana.

They pushed on—slowly. Others, after following the most-knowing "hand" in the Forest, were now thirsting to pose as first-flighters. Hounds in full cry aroused the ardours of the chase.

"Hold hard, you damned fools," roared the ex-master.

"Who are you talking to?" demanded an irate "foreigner."

"I'm talking to you, you ginger-headed counter-jumper. Thanks to me you're seeing a good hunt, and doing your best to spoil it."

The counter-jumper, riding a hireling that looked ashamed of its hirer, pulled up, growling. Somebody whispered to him. Humbly, but scarlet in the face, he kowtowed to past authority.

The fox shot through Hollycroft and across the bog, where hounds checked for the first time, casting them beautifully. The Master left them alone; the Master's wife restrained the thrusters. The gentleman on the bay pony said for the thousand and first time: "Why can't people stand still when hounds throw up? Ah! Gambler has it, b' Jove!"

The sagacious Gambler had hit the line two hundred yards down the water, upon the farther side of the bog. The field had the choice of two crossings equidistant from them. They began to hustle and bustle.

"Idiots!" growled the gentleman on the bay pony. "Why the devil can't they wait to see which way hounds turn?"

Hounds swung left handed.

And then an incident, not without humour, took place. A bride and groom, on their honeymoon at the "Haunch of Venison," Puddenhurst, had taken the field with the intention of having a hunt in a country which they despised because there was no "lepping." They were still in their salad days. Regardless of the fact that master and servants were galloping to the nearest crossing, the youthful pair put their nags at a small brook, cleared it gallantly, and plunged into the bog. Good Samaritans rescued them, amongst them George Tarrant. When the bride was hauled out, she said ingenuously :

"We followed hounds."

George Tarrant replied politely :

"You did. It is not the best way to see the end of a hunt here."

"Beastly country," sputtered the groom.

"It affords amusement to some of us," said George, who had not yet been thanked for first aid.

"I think we'll go back to Puddenhurst," murmured the bride ruefully.

"It might be wiser," said George grimly.

Meanwhile Reynard had gone to ground in a big unstopped earth, which defied shovels and terriers. Major Pundle, the gentleman on the bay pony, and the master declared that their fox was an old acquaintance, who had played the same game before and meant to play it again. Another gentleman, also an ex-master, who enjoyed an hour's gardening, was heard to observe :

"If we could crawl down that bottomless pit we should hear him snickering."

"I shall go back to Ockley," said the Master.

Some of the field grumbled. Why not draw Basleys ? The master heard the grumblings and grinned.

"Can't expect small holders to support hunting unless we kill foxes that kill their poultry. I'm hunting to-day the Ockley country."

He trotted off and back.

Accordingly, as Margery predicted, she and Roddy Selwin "caught up." Diana, seeing the hero with the star performer, allowed a frown to appear between her level brows. It vanished as Roddy approached her.

"Where have you been?"

"The colour of my garments answers your question, Miss Pundle—I've attended my own funeral."

"He must be awfully keen," thought the maiden.

Roddy described the funeral, citing Margery as chief mourner. He added indiscreetly:

"That girl is one of the best."

Diana assented, pensively. Margery, she noticed, had joined her father. She said hopefully:

"We are going back to Ockley. We may find another fox. He is quite likely to take the same line. I'm sorry your first dart with us has been so—so funereal."

"It was splendid fun. I enjoyed it."

"He is keen," she reflected.

This conviction was fortified as they jogged over ground already traversed. The hero, mindful of Harry Slufter's sound advice, talked horse and hound. He quoted Jorrocks; he dealt sympathetically with Mr. Sponge. Diana, youngest of the Pundles, played her part in the comedy. Being a Pundle, in and out of the Forest, she could quote not Surtees but her sire. To Roddy, however, the quotation marks were invisible. He assumed that the young lady spoke with intimate personal knowledge of the absorbing subject.

"To enjoy our hunting," she observed, "you must know something about hounds and hound work. In enclosed countries, followers are rarely in the same field with hounds. They can't watch individual hounds. They don't dare get near them. But here, in the open Forest, it is different. And with a catchy scent, or a ringing fox, the mere riding is nothing. The hound work is everything."

"You know all about it."

"I ought to, but I don't. My sisters know three times as much. You should talk with them."

"I'm perfectly happy talking to you."

"Are you coming out with the buck hounds?"

The question was disconcerting. Immediately after the funeral an unhappy corpse had pronounced himself stark, stiff and stone cold. He had said to himself sorrowfully:

"This isn't my stunt."

Margery resurrected him. More, Timbuctoo had carried him swiftly and smoothly over the plain. The exhilaration of pace quickened the pulses of a man who owned a fast two-seater car.

"Yes," he replied boldly. "I—I have to nip up to town to-morrow for a few days on—on particular business, but I shall be back next week."

Diana smiled at him so sweetly that Roddy plunged even deeper into an exciting future.

"There's not much doing in the city, Miss Pundle. And I hope to get three weeks' leave of absence."

"You will stay at the "Haunch of Venison."

"You advise that?"

"Certainly."

"I—I mean to put myself into the hands of Tom Kinsman."

"Ye—es."

Tom, so Diana knew, was the busiest of men at this time of year. Margery might act as his deputy. Sensible that her "yes" had been dissyllabic, Diana continued with enthusiasm:

"Tom takes pride in suiting customers. If you decided to hunt down here regularly you could buy two useful gees from him, and keep 'em with him. He's a first-class horse master, never stints the corn and has the best of hay."

"It could be done," said Roddy.

Stealing a glance at his companion, he decided that it must be done. Diana's cheeks were flushed, her blue eyes sparkled. Life suddenly presented itself in a series of enchanted vistas. He envisaged himself and Di riding through lovely glades, beneath tender skies, upon sweet-scented heather, sharing a sport which of all sports brings man and maid together in free and unrestrained intimacy.

"It shall be done," he added valiantly.

He forgot—who blames him?—Selwin, Bandycutt and Gannaway.

II

A second fox was not found in Ockley Wood, and scent failed in the afternoon. It is said—and believed implicitly by the gypsies—that the Forest of Ys is haunted by sprites who play malicious pranks upon mortals. Some such sprite, a Puck of Ockley, may have seen to it that Rodney Selwin was constrained by choice and necessity to canter easily by the side of Diana Pundle for some two hours. He could sit upright on a well-mannered horse. Had hounds ran, as they did in the morning, it is likely that a hero would have extinguished himself altogether.

Major Pundle, that Petronius Arbiter of Puddenhurst, accepted his daughter's cavalier as a cavalier although he condemned his kit as unfit even as a vehicle for strong language. Harry Slufter, good fellow, put in a disarming word, according to plan.

"Roddy is wearing borrowed reach-me-downs, Major. He's most awfully keen."

"I didn't see him go this morning."

"He went right enough—into a pond."

The Major nodded with Olympian imperturbability.

"Wearing such 'tac' as he borrowed, he could hardly have done anything else."

"Roddy is going to hunt with us till the end of April, if he can fix things with his governor. Only son—Come into a bit of stuff by and bye."

"Rides like a sailor, my boy."

"He is—he was—a sailor."

"If you vouch for him, I'll ask him to dine."

"Of course I vouch for him."

And thus Fate, or the imps of comedy, soap the ways of life.

Eventually, hounds went back to kennels earlier than usual. Roddy left Timbuctoo at the "Tarrant Arms." Harry Slufter and he persuaded the good sportsman who keeps the inn that if whisky and soda could not be sold before six it might be given generously to thirsty fellow creatures. Over the bubbling glass, the two friends agreed to meet next day in London.

"My snip can do the thing to rights, if I press him."

"Good old Harry! I expect he presses you—for payment of goods delivered."

"Not he. Saville Row is a cut above that. I've been looking at your leg, Roddy. It isn't an encouraging leg—except for a kilt. If my man has a fit when he sees it, sit tight."

"I'm going to sit as tight as I can for the next four weeks—out of the saddle at any rate."

"I shall take you," continued Harry earnestly, "to a riding school, run by a cove who was riding master in my regiment. He's a corker. Six lessons from him, and we sha'n't know you. Six will put a sort of gloss on you."

Roddy looked doubtful.

"I'm in for it," he observed. "You're a pal worth having."

"I shall do my duty by you, Roddy. One more? Make it a brace, what?"

"No," said Roddy firmly. "This biz has got to be carried through to a finish without jumping powder."

I must see Tom Kinsman before I trek it to West-hampton."

"Good egg! Take Tom into your confidence—about your ridin', I mean."

Roddy smiled.

"Tom has taken my measure," he said, "and so has Miss Kinsman."

"Ah! Missy——! I had forgotten her. Missy is the goods. If Missy likes you all is well."

Fatuously, indeed, do we make these astounding affirmations!

III

Roddy wasted no time in getting to Puddenhurst. As he buzzed along he felt uncommonly pleased with himself. He had embarked on a great adventure—and he loved adventures. What son of the sea does not? He had left blue water regretfully, but he had to admit that his father was in the right of it when he said incisively:

"I'm senior partner in a good firm, Roddy, and I want to retire. When I retire more than half my income disappears automatically, and it isn't the income it was before the war. Frankly, it comes to this: stick to the service and you'll be a poor man till I turn up my toes, and not a rich man afterwards. That's that. Join us, and you can expect to step into my shoes. You'll have to work like a nigger, and begin at the bottom, but I can make things fairly easy for you, if you take hold. If I know you, you will take hold."

Roddy had taken hold. After three years in the office he was now an authorized clerk in the Stock Exchange and quite at home with the bulls and bears. Even Bandycutt and Gannaway, with youngsters of their own coming on, had to admit that young Selwin earned his screw.

He found Tom in his sanctum, poring over accounts. "Collecting" was not the pleasantest part of an arduous job. Cut-me-down captains often hired horses under the sincere conviction that they earned a mount by riding it. Tom didn't share this conviction, and yet he hated to dun any young man for overdue bills. As a matter of fact the peremptory letters with "your cheque will oblige" as a postscript were penned by Missy.

"Glad to see you," said Tom. "Sorry you found the Forest a bit wet."

"Soft going means soft falling," said Roddy.

He offered the dealer a Corona, which came out of a box belonging to his father, a particular brand reserved for principals in business.

"Thank ye. Looks very like a cigar."

"I think you'll appreciate it, Mr. Kinsman. I want to bespeak your good will."

"You have it," said Tom bluntly. "I can size up a man or a horse quick. Cottoned to you, I did, when I saw your nose. You follow your nose and it won't lead you far astray. Now what can I do?"

Roddy was not to be outdone in plainness of speech.

"You must have sized me up as all sorts of a fool when I looked over your gees."

"You picked a good 'un."

"Luck, Mr. Kinsman. And I picked one that is too good for me. I found that out this morning. I've ridden ponies at Malta and Gib., but I can't ride a yard really. I mean to learn. If I can make certain arrangements with my father, I shall be down here in less than ten days. I intend to hunt four days a week."

"You're a rare plucked 'un, I must say."

"If you will mount me on what you think is suitable I shall be much obliged."

"I'll see to that, sir."

"Miss Kinsman," continued Roddy pleasantly, "was very kind to-day. Please thank her. She kept an eye on me."

"Missy uses her eyes—gets that from me. You have a talk with Missy when you get back to Puddenhurst. What you don't know, she does, see?"

"I do."

"Missy will take you down to my school, if you care to try a horse over a fence; Missy'll take you into the saddle room and round the boxes. You can learn a lot by just looking at my bridles with Missy. And if I say it, nobody, not even the Major, has a better seat on a horse."

"I am of your opinion. Any advice from Miss Kinsman will be accepted by me with a humble and grateful heart."

IV

The dealer had given his daughter a good education and one piece of advice:

"Tell the truth, Missy, when it doesn't hurt other people's feelings, and keep your stockings well gartered. I hate slummicky girls."

In his less robust moments Tom sometimes wondered whether he might have exercised greater care in the selection of Missy's mother. He had married in haste a farmer's daughter. After five years of bickering she had left him and her child, running away with a good-looking, good-for-nothing bagman. "And a riddance, too," said Tom. She had committed the unpardonable sin not in deserting her husband but Margery. That rankled. It was immediately after this domestic bereavement that Tom left Melchester. He dismissed the faithless wife from his mind as he dismissed a bad debt. But, a sensibility—for which few gave him credit—made him avoid reference to her. Somehow, somewhere, gossip started the lie that she was dead.

A wiser man than Tom would have strangled the lie at birth. Tom welcomed it. In Puddenhurst nobody questioned it. Missy, for instance, believed that her mother was singing in the heavenly choir, along with other angel mothers. Once she startled Tom by asking abruptly: "Do all mothers become good when they die?" Tom's reply was quite as startling to a child of six. "Some of 'em," he said, "are never good till they do die."

"Was my mummy good before she died?"

"Course she was. Good as gold before she died, and better after. You run away and play."

The child left her mother in heaven. In time she grasped the essential fact that her father lived in the present, although not unmindful of the future. He would say, irritably:

"Yesterday is no good to me."

Yesterdays—so Missy decided—were not much good to anybody.

From time to time, Tom heard from his wife, and, on such occasions "hot fomentations" were applied inwardly to soothe his lacerated mental tissues. Invariably she demanded a grant in aid. Tom knew that she was drifting down a path that leads to the streets. Long ago, she had left the bagman or he had left her, the likelier hypothesis. Her brief epistles were not autobiographical. Between the ill-written lines a threat might be detected. The writer, with crass insistency, pledged herself to keep away from her husband indefinitely if he would kindly send a remittance——!

Of course, he might have divorced her. But this easy solution of the problem had not, apparently, suggested itself to either of them—partly, perhaps, because man and woman belonged to a class that fears lawyers and courts of law. Tom's experience of the holy state of matrimony served to confirm his resolution to remain single. When spinsters and widows in not

too easy circumstances glanced invitingly at the prosperous dealer, he would engage them in what he termed "bandinage." It is to be feared that he sometimes lured them on into quagmires of disappointment, but he was whispering to himself the while: "Never again!"

After Selwin left the office, Tom pulled out a letter and stared at it morosely:

Dear Tom (it began)—I hope this finds you in the pink. And how's the kid. . . . ? "

The dealer's throat felt parched. It exasperated him that Em'ly should allude to Missy as "the kid." Being sharp as a lancet where his own interests were concerned, he divined that this cheap and humbugging question indicated no maternal solicitude, but was part and parcel of the veiled threat. Freely interpreted it meant: "If you drop this letter into the fire, *my* daughter will hear from *me*." Tom read on:

"I ain't been enjoying the best of luck, had a bad dose of 'flu. Now I'm back at the old pitch. . . ."

Tom cursed the old pitch, which happened to be a bar in a Plymouth hotel hardly to be described as first class. It was difficult to envisage Missy's mother behind a bar. He growled out: "Behind bars you ought to be, my girl," and finished reading the letter—

"Being ill and all that, I got into debt. If there's trouble over it, I shall get the sack, so send along, dear, what you can spare."

He burnt the letter, muttering to himself: "Fed up I am—bleed me white she would. I've nothing left to spare for the likes of her." Hot fomentations speeded Em'ly to a destination which was not the heavenly choir.

The hot fomentations were applied in the dining-room of his small house, which stood handy to The Yard. From his bedroom window Tom could hear obstreperous nags kicking, and sometimes casting themselves, at night.

The dining-room reflected faithfully the man's personality. It was solidly furnished in good Spanish mahogany, picked up here and there at country sales. The cellaret was a vast, early-Victorian affair. Upon the walls hung half a dozen valuable sporting prints. They were so valuable that Tom spoke of them as "bait." Connoisseurs asked for the privilege of seeing them. After a glass of sherry and a biscuit, gentlemen devoted to the chase would expatiate on the glories of a bygone day and, fortified by what had been done by the right sort, stroll forth with Tom to inspect his "cattle" in the happiest of humours.

Missy mixed her father's toddy.

"You won't want more than one, dad?"

"Hay? I never take more than one."

Missy answered soothingly:

"I daresay you forget the second, if—if the first is mixed right."

Tom smiled at her.

"Limp to my grave, I shall, if you go on pulling my leg. Well, Missy, you made a hit to-day with the Commander."

"He doesn't call himself Commander. He did command a destroyer at Zeebrugge. But now he's just Mr. Selwin, in business."

"Nice young fellow," said Tom. "Paid me a call just now. Not a know-it-all! He's putting himself into our hands, and we'll treat him right, Missy."

"Our hands?"

"You must do your bit."

"Mr. Selwin has a lot to learn."

"About horses." Tom nodded solemnly. "If anybody can teach him, it's you, Missy. Next season, he hinted that he might want a couple of good 'uns of his own."

"Funny, isn't it?"

Tom sipped his toddy.

"Funny? Why?"

Missy explained slowly:

"Why should he get so keen so suddenly?"

"None of our business. It's a bit of all right, I say, that hunting is on the boom. Young fellows that served in the war are short of excitement. And so, they take to the chase. There you have it."

"Yes," said Missy pensively.

CHAPTER IV

SELWIN, BANDYCUTT & GANNAWAY

I

RODDY arrived punctually at the office on Monday morning, and exchanged a smart coat for a shabby one. He had not yet seen his father, who, being a "thrifer," came up from Woking by a late train that held no "strivers." Roddy remained in London in his father's flat. Upon the first of November, Selwin senior left Woking and a comfortable house near the golf course and established himself in Knightsbridge. Upon the first of April he and his—with the exception of Roddy—returned to Woking. No attempt was made to let the flat during the London season. It remained available for Roddy and for any members of the Selwin family who wished to "do" some shopping or a play. A family retainer, once Roddy's nurse, looked after Roddy and the flat when the other servants were at Woking. The other servants addressed this ancient handmaiden as Mrs. Froghook, although she wore no circlet of bondage upon the third finger of her capable left hand. Roddy called her Mollie, which was, as Euclid observed, absurd. Mollie, however, she had been when Roddy was breeched, and Mollie she remained to him.

Roddy had special work to do before he crossed over to the "house," and to this work he applied himself with extra energy conscious that Mr. Bandycutt was hypercritical concerning the son of the senior partner.

Bandycutt, if he could, would have pushed the fortunes of his nephew, also in the office and, admittedly, a pusher. When Roddy took his seat upon a lofty, well-worn stool in the clerical department, everybody knew that the pusher's nose must be paining him. More, Mr. Gannaway was the proud father of two sons still at Cambridge, and two other stools in the big office were being kept warm for them. Gideon Gannaway admitted to the wife of his bosom that he regarded Roddy as an interloper. Being a just man he had to admit, also, that Roddy was making good.

Presently Selwin senior bustled in, and hurried to the partners' room, where certain formalities were rigorously observed. Underwriting new issues of large and prosperous "industrials" was not the least part of a fine business. Selwin attended to this underwriting because he alone of the three partners had established connection with certain financial houses, and their representatives liked to do business with him. As jobbers, both Bandycutt and Gannaway, bought and sold on the floor of the house.

As a rule, Roddy lunched with his father at a city club. They met, as usual, at the same hour and at the small corner table reserved for Mr. Selwin. During luncheon, which rarely exceeded half an hour, father and son dropped by tacit consent the business relationship and refreshed and relaxed themselves like two sensible men. Common sense distinguished the Selwins, who—it may have been remarked—did not spell their names with a "y." Roddy's father came of yeoman stock. In a remote corner of Dorset, the Selwins had farmed land which didn't belong to them for nearly five hundred years. George Selwin happened to be a third son, inheriting the tenacity and honesty of his forbears, and with these good qualities a shrewdness that rose higher than its source. By the luck of things, an uncle and godfather (on the maternal side) recognized

the boy's ability and pushed his fortunes. Through this uncle, George was taken into a solicitor's office and, not liking the job, was shortly transferred to a high stool in the office of a London stockbroker. Here he displayed such aptitudes for making friends and doing business with them that he was promoted to the dignity of a very junior partnership. At the end of thirty years' hard work he became head of the firm. George would say modestly :

" Business came to me."

He liked to be addressed as " Squire." And he wore stout garments that suggested John Bull. Nobody could accuse him of snobbery. Nevertheless, it was a source of honest pride in him that his family were identified with the land. He considered an English country-gentleman to be God's best creation. Before the war, he cherished the hope that his son would be a real squire some day. He had encouraged Roddy to become either a soldier or a sailor, because these professions were open to squires' sons ; he had hoped that Roddy might marry a squire's daughter. At the moment when war was declared, an ambitious father was contemplating the purchase of a manorial estate in Dorset. The Huns blew these ambitions to smithereens, as has been recorded.

A shrewd paternal eye detected in Roddy suppressed excitement.

" You enjoyed your dances, my boy ? "

" I did. I say, father, I had a day with the hounds on Saturday."

" Did you ? Well, why not ? Why not ? I rode to hounds when I was ten years old."

" Yes ; I've tasted blood, and I want some more of it. I—I astonished myself ; and I astonished even—even more the old horse I rode or tried to ride."

George Selwin chuckled.

"It seems to me," continued Roddy, warming to his theme, "that Stevenson is right when he says that a young fellow oughtn't to be afraid of making a fool of himself. I made a fool of myself on Saturday, but I'm twice the man for it."

"So—you tasted blood?"

"Hounds didn't, but I did. Hunting is over in most countries, but it goes on till May in the Forest of Ys—buck hounds and fox hounds."

"I can see that you want another day."

George Selwin's eyes twinkled.

"Could I get three weeks off, father?"

"Three weeks off—to *hunt*?"

"Yes."

"To hunt—what? Come, come, Roddy, own up! You've found a dear in the Forest of Ys. Who is she?"

Whereupon Roddy made confession. Let us admit that his hand was forced prematurely. At the same time, he had to be honest with a kind and generous sire.

"A Pundle of Pundle's Green——!"

Old George rolled the words on his tongue. Hastily he summoned the wine waiter.

"Charles?"

"Sir?"

"Decant a bottle of the best port in the club."

"Yessir."

"We will drink the young lady's health, Roddy."

Roddy protested mildly.

"You understand, father, that everything is still in the air. I—I hardly know the young lady. I—I didn't mean to mention her name, but you have such a way with you——"

Selwin *père* frowned, as he thought of his partners, Bandycutt and Gannaway. Roddy went on, hesitatingly:

"I'm chasing a rainbow."

"You seem to be chasing the right sort. Count on me to help you. I have dreamed of this. If things go well, and I've faith that they will, you shall go back to the land—your own land, please God!"

He spoke with solemnity.

"Harry Slufter says that I must ride into her heart. Now you've got it."

"Yes; but I'm thinking of Bandycutt and Gannaway."

Roddy nodded.

"If this scheme of mine—three weeks off—is going to cause unpleasantness between you and your partners, it must be scrapped."

Selwin senior laughed. Sensible men cannot be blamed for laughing when they find their own weapons turned against them. He knew that his partners could be unpleasant. Indeed, he anticipated "objections" from both of them, inasmuch as business, after a period of stagnation, was brightening and increasing in volume. But he was ready to deal with them faithfully. He laughed because Roddy, quite unconsciously, had assumed his mantle. Selwin senior possessed a faculty of thinking for the other fellow. He had put through some big deals with the odds against him, because he could state another's case as fairly as he stated his own. On occasion he had pointed out difficulties which had not presented themselves to the other fellow. Magnates had to admit that Selwin smoothed down such difficulties, but he refused to ignore them merely to bolster up his own ends. And, because of this, the magnates liked to do business with him. Bandycutt and Gannaway were cut to a different pattern.

"You can have this holiday," said the senior partner. An authorized clerk replied respectfully:

"You are most awfully good, sir."

"My boy, you put it across me."

"Did I? In what way?"

"My way. You considered *me*. I have never lost much by considering the interests of others, particularly when they clashed with my own. That, indeed, is the time to do it."

"Yes; I suppose it is.

As the supposition burgeoned into conviction, Roddy added quietly: "I can afford this little spree."

Selwin senior laughed again.

"Good! But don't break your neck!"

II

Bandycutt and Gannaway were unpleasant, the more so because they wriggled under the heel of Selwin's good humour and imperturbability. Selwin marched out of the partner's room jauntily, delivering a Parthian thrust at the door.

"I have bought a new driver. I am going to try it after tea."

"Thick-skinned beggar," said Bandycutt.

"Patronizing," growled Gannaway.

The sense of obligation rankled, as it always does with the baser sort. Selwin had "made" them. In a different sense each had been the architect of his fortunes. Nobody denied to either Bandycutt or Gannaway certain qualities. They were shrewd, hardworking men, determined "hustlers," of the "nothing for nothing and very little for sixpence" type. In a lively market no jobbers were quicker to take advantage of the fluctuations in prices. But each might have remained for another ten years in a subordinate position, if their chief had been less generous than George Selwin.

Gratitude for what he had done evaporated swiftly when Roddy came into the office. Each had grinned at the other when the senior partner's only son put to sea. The boy was mad keen to become a sailor. And, at that time, Selwin could call himself a rich man. The clause in his agreement with his junior partners

which provided for the Selwin succession was deemed of less importance than the boy's bent for the sea. The war changed these conditions. Selwin was hard hit in his private investments. He had foreseen the boom in oil. Unhappily, he had backed his faith in Russia and Hungary. At the end of the war, he found himself seriously impoverished, unable to retire, unable to provide adequately for a gallant son. The fact that Roddy had survived the war minimized all losses. He never alluded to them. But he had to lay the changed situation before Roddy, and Roddy had been sensible.

Bandycutt and Gannaway gnashed their teeth.

They glowered at each other, as Selwin closed the door.

"Do I hunt?" asked Gannaway.

Very fortunately for hounds, he didn't. Bandycutt said viciously:

"If I had my way, Gideon, I'd put down fox hunting. Cruel sport! Lot of noodles riding over wheat and smashing fences. I never had any use for the idle rich."

Gannaway lit a cigar.

He possessed hindsight. He could be very wise after the event.

"We lost our hair," he growled.

Bandycutt assented, conscious that he had little to spare. He could read on Gannaway's face, clean shaven with deep lines about mouth and eyes, honest regret.

Gannaway went on, reflectively, puffing slowly at his cigar.

"We ought really to have encouraged this."

"That's too thick, Gideon."

"Not at all. This *ardor venatoris*——"

"What?"

Bandycutt had not received a classical education, as Gannaway was aware. Latin tags still serve, provocatively, to mark differences between man and man.

"The ardour for the chase, Harold, is a singular obsession. To me fox hunters are lunatics. If this young fool wants to break his neck, why should we butt in?"

"There's something in that, Gideon, but we don't want him to break his neck."

"Of course not. And there isn't much danger of that, I take it. I was speaking metaphorically. The chief would soon be fed up with a slacker, particularly if he happened to be his own son."

"That's true enough. But Roddy isn't a slacker."

"Our energies," said Gannaway pompously (he was a speaker at city companies' dinners), "can be overdrawn. You and I have given undivided energies to business."

Bandycutt nodded solemnly.

"Even I," continued Gannaway, "at my age, went through a course of Pelmanism."

"Yes; and you were a bit slack when you were at that."

"Reculez pour mieux sauter."

"Damn!" exclaimed Bandycutt.

Gannaway waved his cigar, which had been taken from the chief's box. Sensible of his powers of speech, he was careful not to abuse them.

"You know what I mean, my dear fellow——"

"I don't. The King's English is good enough for me."

"Well, well, we musn't become heated. I repeat *ad nauseum*—I mean I repeat emphatically that it is to our ultimate interest if young Selwin shirks his job."

"Now you're talking," said Bandycutt approvingly.

Gannaway rose from his chair.

"To-morrow," he murmured suavely, "I shall say something pleasant to young Selwin. He will probably repeat it to his father."

"You're a sly old fox, Gideon."

"Possibly. My sympathy lies with foxes, not with fox hunters."

"Same here," said Bandycutt.

III

Roddy meanwhile was on his way to Savile Row, where Harry Slufter awaited him. The Captain was staying at the Selwin's flat. To serve a friend he had sacrificed two days' hunting. It occurred to Roddy, as he sped westward in the Tube, that such a sacrifice might have been made in vain had leave of absence been refused. What a good fellow the Pater was! For instance, comparing him with Bandycutt and Gannaway——! But Roddy didn't know either of his father's partners in their home life. This was another source of humiliation to them. Mrs. Selwin had never called upon Mrs. Bandycutt or Mrs. Gannaway. It might have been expedient to do so after subordinates were raised to the dignity of partners, but the situation was awkward. So long as the two men were little more than clerks, Mrs. Selwin was hardly aware of their existence. And for many years after the clerks became partners, their wives remained in an obscure suburb far from Knightsbridge.

From Piccadilly Circus Roddy took a taxi to Doswell and Toomes. No less a personage than Mr. Toomes himself was listening blandly to Captain Slufter, who had notions of his own about the proper cutting of breeches. According to Harry the seam behind the knee was not permissible. Toomes respected fads because he had fads of his own.

"Mr. Toomes," said Harry solemnly, "is going to give you, Roddy, his personal attention."

It is to be feared that Roddy hardly appreciated his amazing good fortune, but he had wit enough to say gratefully:

"I'm most awfully obliged to Mr. Toomes and you."

Mr. Toomes bowed.

The three were standing in the nave, so to speak, of the temple of fashion. There were many side chapels. To one of these the worshippers would retire in due time. The right cloth had to be chosen first. Mr. Toomes eyed Roddy critically, not glancing above the waist. Probably he decided in one fleeting second that Roddy's physical configuration would not serve to advertise any breeches. He laid a slim yellow finger upon a Bedford cord to be commended, apart from its wearing qualities, because it was inconspicuous.

"This, I think, Captain, will be about the thing."

"Yes," said Harry.

Valiantly Roddy concealed his disappointment. He "fancied" a lighter colour and a smooth cloth, such as became Harry vastly well. But Harry had the leg of a hussar.

"Three pairs, Mr. Toomes."

"Three pairs," echoed Mr. Toomes. "I will send with them a preparation of our own for cleaning the strapping. You will have them strapped, Captain?"

"Of course."

"White," suggested Roddy.

"I—I think not," murmured Mr. Toomes.

"Same colour as the cloth," said the Captain, with finality.

The sacred rites were observed. Presently Mr. Toomes withdrew. Roddy whispered to Harry:

"What about my coat and waistcoat?"

"Tch! Toomes doesn't cut coats. Doswell will be with us in two twos."

Mr. Doswell appeared from the chancel. A quiet grey tweed was selected, and (to Roddy's delight) a canary cloth was set aside for the waistcoat.

"Leather buttons, Mr. Doswell."

"Leather buttons, Captain."

"Fullish skirts, not too much waisted, pockets on the slant, allow for plenty of play beneath the armpits."

Mr. Doswell inclined his head.

Under great pressure from the Captain, it was arranged that the first trying-on should take place at the same time on the morrow.

"I shall be here," said Harry.

"The Captain," observed Mr. Doswell, "can handle the chalk himself. We shall do our best to satisfy him."

"Very many thanks," murmured Roddy, humbly.

"We will make a dart for Griffin," said the Captain. "I 'phoned him that we were coming."

The illustrious Mr. Griffin dissembled when he beheld Roddy's calf. Difficulties arose immediately over the delivery of the boots. The Captain said mournfully :

"It will break Mr. Selwin's heart if he has to go to Wackett. Surely you can stretch a point, Griffin?"

Ultimately the point was stretched. Mr. Griffin pledged himself to deliver the boots on Friday night at the Knightsbridge flat. A pair of spurs was bought.

"File 'em down," said the Captain.

Scarves, gloves, a heavy gold safety-pin, and a Billy Coke hat (from Mr. Rock) were added to the kit. The young men returned to the flat to dress for dinner at Roddy's club. Stalls, on the gangway, had been booked for that popular musical comedy, *The Girls with the Curls*.

As the Captain tipped up his cocktail, he said contemptively :

"A rare afternoon's work. We have earned our corn."

Within five minutes they had their noses in the manger.

After the play the comrades returned to the flat, full of beans. Roddy said suddenly :

"Great Pharaoh's ghost! We forgot the crop."

The Captain pursed his lips.

"Crop is coming into common use," he admitted.
"But my father would have winced."

"Wincel."

"His generation called it a whip. The whip, old thing, has not been forgotten. Wait!"

He rushed off to his bedroom and returned with a parcel, which he placed in Roddy's hand.

"My contribution."

In less than a minute Roddy was gazing at a most workmanlike article, with his initials, in cypher, upon a broad silver band above the horn.

"The thong," said the Captain, "is on the short side, but beautifully balanced. It pops itself. All the same *don't* pop it. You may put your eye out. Carry it like this. I told 'em to slip in a blob of wax. Here it is. Keep it waxed. Kangaroo leather and catgut—last you a lifetime."

"You're one of the very best."

"I want," said Harry, almost portentously, "to see you through this—right side up! The Major and Di must believe that your kit is of your own choosing. That is important."

Roddy protested. Harry remained firm.

"Whilst you were at the office, to-day, I nipped in to the riding school. My old friend will take you on from five to six. I've told him that—er—a gloss is wanted. You begin on Wednesday. On Saturday you can put in two hours. By Monday—hounds meet at "The Bird in Hand"—you will feel more at home on Timbuctoo."

"Thanks and thanks again. I'm not riding Timbuctoo. Tom Kinsman is finding me something more suitable."

Harry finished on a high note:

"You will be entered to 'buck' properly."

IV

Roddy confided to Mrs. Froghook part of the truth. It was her habit to linger over Roddy's valeting, indulging the while, in slightly acidulous gossip, which as she knew, Master Roddy was not likely to repeat to his people. There are, perhaps, some of the straight-laced who never listen to servants' gossip. Anyway, they say that they don't. Roddy was not straight-laced. Mrs. Froghook amused him. He encouraged her to "throw her tongue."

When he told his old nurse that he was going a-hunting, she held up trembling hands.

"You ain't going to do no such silly thing."

"But I am, Mollie."

"Whatever for?"

"To—to enjoy myself, of course."

"I mind me you was always a oner for paper chases."

"Childish—compared to the genuine thing."

"Your pa ought to be ashamed of hisself for allowing it. And you an only son. Ain't you afeard?"

"To you, Mollie, and to you alone, I will admit that I am in a blue funk, but I've been in a blue funk before. It is good, very good, for a man to conquer the funks. He isn't a man till he does."

"I b'lieve," affirmed Mrs. Froghook, "that a young lady is be'ind this. You can't deceive me, Master Roddy."

"No, Mollie, I can't, but I can try."

Mrs. Froghook paused in her ministrations, a pair of socks in hand. Roddy lay in bed, and, therefore, at a disadvantage.

"Who is she, Master Roddy?"

"You wicked old woman! Leave the room!"

"I've been told by your elders and betters, Master Roddy, to leave the room and to leave the 'ouse. But I know my duty to the family."

To steer the talk into less dangerous channels, the artful Roddy said encouragingly :

“ Really now, Mollie, tell me—did you get the sack from the mater just before they went down to Woking ? ”

“ Yes, I did.”

“ What for ? ”

“ I was accused,” said Mrs. Froghook with dignity, “ of making trouble with the other servants. So I did. I’m not one to stand by and see folks swindled. That hussy of a cook was sending off food, by parcels’ post to her young man—and *him* a policeman——! She sent off two pounds o’ salmon. And when your ma ordered kedgeriee for breakfast, what d’you think she done, the baggage ? ”

“ I can’t even guess.”

“ She coloured up some plaice with cochineal. There ! ”

“ You told the mater that ? ”

“ Not me. I let the mistress think what she liked. When she gave me notice, I up and told her that I wouldn’t take it. Now I must be getting your breakfast.”

She bustled out without asking more questions.

CHAPTER V

A TUFT WITH THE BUCK HOUNDS

I

THE novice reached Puddenhurst in time for luncheon on Sunday. His "kit" had been delivered punctually and "put on" in the presence of Mrs. Froghook. Without her aid the Griffin boots might have remained on indefinitely, because there was no bootjack in the Knightsbridge flat. Mrs. Froghook expressed disappointment when she saw Mr. Doswell's coat.

"It ought to be red—sure—ly."

"Not yet, Mollie. Too much is expected of a man in a red coat."

"Dearie me! I did think that was the reason why gentlemen went a-hunting. About the only chance they 'ave to dress up smarter than the ladies."

"What a cynic you are, darling Mollie. But, honestly, do I look, well—*sporting*?"

Mrs. Froghook was not to be beguiled by endearing adjectives into wandering from the path of truth.

"I can't lie to you, Master Roddy. But looking at you this instant minute I can smell stables, and I never could abear that beastly smell."

Roddy beamed at her.

"You blessed Mollie, you couldn't have paid me a handsomer compliment."

At the "Haunch of Venison" he was assigned a comfortable bedroom not too far from a bathroom, and *ardor venatoris* was freshly kindled by long inspection

of steel engravings of ex-masters of hounds that adorned the reception rooms. A glass of port from the wood was pronounced thinnish stuff. The black strap commended by Mr. Jorrocks might have sent our hero, hot foot, to Pundle Green. Instead, after coffee and a cigar, he wandered down the village street to Kinsman's yard.

Quite unconsciously, he understudied the gait and deportment of a personage staying at the "Haunch of Venison." This Olympian was master of a crack pack in the Midlands. Roddy eyed him with awe. An Admiral of the Fleet had inspired just such awe when Roddy was a midshipmite. Swank was absent from the Great Man, but he had an air——! Roddy, now familiar with the illustrations of John Leech, could see him sailing over the wide pastures of High Leicestershire. He had brought three magnificent horses from that terrestrial paradise, so a waiter informed the novice, and he was hunting on the morrow.

Roddy found Tom in his dining-room, and he was not drinking port from the wood. Opposite to him sat Missy in her Sunday clothes. In these nobody, certainly, could have mistaken her for a boy. Father and daughter made the visitor welcome. Tom was in whimsical humour, and chuckling over a successful deal.

"Shall I tell the Commander?" he asked Missy.

"It will make him laugh, dad."

"But mum's the word, hay?"

Roddy promised to hold his tongue.

"It was this way," said Tom. "I really had him to rights, but he's got value received, and all parties are happy. There's an old fellow out Brockenford way, who never can make up what's left of a very small mind about anything. He walked into The Yard last Wednesday and told me to find him a cob. I said I'd do my best and meant it. Off he goes. I had a cob out at my farm which Missy and I decided was the article.

So I sent for the cob. On Thursday morning bright and early I met old Sam Winteridge in Puddenhurst High Street, and we passed the time of day. He says to me : ' I've brought a cob over to sell to Colonel Permain — that was my customer's name. ' Have you ? ' says I, ' then we two, Sam, must pull together. For why ? ' ' Cos I've a cob to sell him, too.' We spun a tizzy there and then to settle who had first go. He won. I took a squint at the goods : ' Yours is the better animal, Sam. What are you asking for him ? ' Sam Winteridge beats no bushes. ' I want fifty,' he says, ' not a farthing more or less.' I told him he'd get it. The cob looked rough, mind you, but the stuff was there. ' If he don't buy,' says I to Sam, ' I'll take my nag over this afternoon. Let me know if you make a deal.' Sam rides off to Brockenford, and so sure was I that the Colonel 'd take the cob that I nearly sent back my own to the farm. Before noon, back comes Sam on his cob, cussing and swearing. ' That damned old fool,' he says, ' don't know what he wants, but he's asking for a thick ear. He rode the cob, found it to be all I said, an' then got nappy because it looked rough. ' I'm lookin', ' he says, ' for more quality.' And the quality was there under that rough coat. No fault to find with the price. Said he'd pay a bit more for quality. I rode off and left him.' Well, Commander, I gave old Sam a wet, and told him I'd get him his fifty quid inside of a week. In the afternoon I saddled up and jogged over to Brockenford on my cob. And, bearing in mind what Sam said, I had my cob titivated up a fair treat. The Colonel looked him over and titupped up and down on him. Then I saw his old chin waggling with the rankest indecision. I'd asked him fifty, and was ready to shave the price a trifle. I'm a liar if the old boy didn't turn on me with the same song and dance that madded Sam. ' I don't object to the price, Mr. Kinsman,' he says, ' but I want more quality.' I asked him straight :

'Will you get it, Colonel, for fifty quid?' He answered back, in a rasping voice, which makes me think he was a ranker: 'I hope so.' Then I offered it, nearly as mad as Sam. But half way to Puddenhurst, inspiration nearly knocked me out of the saddle. I sent Bert over to Sam's with a cheque for fifty quid, and back he comes on the cob. Bert and I put in a day's work on him, hogged him, fixed up his flag, and clipped him. Next morning I put Missy on to him, and sent her over to Brockenford. You finish the yarn, Missy."

Miss Kinsman did so.

"Colonel Permain came out of the house, and looked the cob over. I said nothing. If he recognized him I was ready with an explanation. We had smartened up an animal taken from a farm. The Colonel smiled at me; and I smiled at the Colonel. 'This,' he said, 'is quality. Does he belong to your father?' I said that he did. The Colonel tried him. When he got off the cob, I knew he was sold. Then I said what dad told me to say: 'You wanted quality, sir, and father asks seventy-five for this cob.' '*Guineas?*' he rapped out, and his chin was shaking. '*Pounds,*' I said. And, as his chin stopped wagging I added on my own: 'Father can't take a penny less.' 'He's mine,' said the Colonel."

Tom winked at Roddy.

"And everybody is happy."

Missy accompanied Roddy to the yard, where twenty horses had their heads out of the boxes.

"You are riding Rescue to-morrow," said Missy.

Together they looked at Rescue. One of the strappers stripped the horse, a bay with black points, not more than fifteen hands, with a good shoulder and quarters, and plenty of beef on him.

"What do you think of him?"

Roddy hesitated. If the first observation about a horse be well and truly laid, something is accomplished.

A novice can't make a serious blunder when looking at a hireling if he observes thoughtfully: "I've seen worse." This can be followed up with: "Not as young as he used to be, is he?"

Roddy, however, being guileless about horses and women, offered an honest opinion of Rescue.

"Seems well nourished, Miss Kinsman."

Missy grasped what he meant.

"Yes; carries a lot of flesh, a rare doer, never sick or sorry, but a bit of a slug. If you should spur him on the shoulder——"

Roddy interrupted her:

"Surely that is not the right place, Miss Kinsman?"

Missy smiled. Timbuctoo had been spurred on the shoulder by Roddy, but obviously the Commander was unaware of this high misdemeanour. She continued:

"It isn't the right place, but if you should spur him there or anywhere else he won't mind. He knows his job, does Rescue, and he hates falling about. But he's on the slow side. Still, dad and I agreed that for the first week you would want——"

"To get my bearings."

"Yes. In our Forest, it is a fact that lookers-on do see most of the game. Rescue is a follower. He likes to follow other horses. I don't believe you could coax him to cross a boggy place first."

"I'm sure I couldn't," said Roddy candidly.

"Will you ride him on to the meet?"

"Do you advise that?"

"Yes; I do. One gets on terms with a new horse. Rescue can shog along, hound-pace, six miles an hour, for ever and ever. Some of the gentlemen at the "Haunch of Venison" have their own motors; some chip in together to hire a car. The meet is only five miles off."

"I don't know the way."

"I can show you the short cut."

Roddy thanked her, but he said not a word about his kit. It was comforting to reflect that Tom Kinsman's daughter would not be ashamed of her companion. As they left Rescue's box, the star performer added another solacing word :

"He has a good shoulder. If he should peck over a rut or rabbit-hole, he won't put you down."

"We'll hope for the best about that, Miss Kinsman. What about Tuesday ? "

"Hounds meet Hernshaw Magna way. We may do nothing, to-morrow. If so it wouldn't hurt Rescue a little bit to go out again. Work seems to brighten him up. If we have a hard day, father has another horse for you, not unlike Rescue. Would you care to see him ? "

"Please."

The other horse didn't appear to Roddy's inexperienced eye to resemble the well-nourished Rescue. He was thin.

"Not the best of doers. You saw that we had Rescue on sawdust ? "

"I didn't notice it."

"He eats everything else. This horse, Tipperary, is Forest-wise, and he'll take good care of you. *He* doesn't take hold. You want to enjoy yourself, don't you ? "

"Yes."

"Both these horses will stand still, and move quietly through trees. You will be all right on them."

Roddy was doubtful about this, but he thanked Miss Kinsman effusively. It was arranged that they should ride on together to the "Bird in Hand," leaving The Yard at eleven. Hounds met at twelve in April.

II

Putting on his kit, next morning, was a memorable experience, bitter-sweet, because Roddy was not sure

that he remembered all that Mr. Toomes had said on the subject. The Captain had given a first lesson in the art of tying a scarf. Surveying himself in the glass, our hero was, on the whole, pleased, and tackled his eggs and bacon with appetite. Men, accoutred for the chase, nodded to him. He had listened to some of them after dinner in the smoking-room, agreeably surprised to find that he was accepted by these sportsmen as one of themselves without presenting any credentials save those inscribed upon an open countenance. All of them knew that he had come to Puddenhurst to hunt. That knowledge sufficed.

To his humiliation he discovered at breakfast that his garters were improperly adjusted. However, he kept his legs well out of sight, and sneaked up to his bedroom when the coast was clear. Trained powers of observation could detect nothing else much amiss. Smoking his pipe in the hall, he had reason to thank his pal for the care exercised in the matter of boots. A tall, thin young man, smoking a cigar as long and as thin as himself, pointed the cigar at Roddy's underpinning.

"Griffin——?"

"Yes," said Roddy.

"The only man, what?"

He glanced at the coat.

"Doswell, of course."

Roddy nodded, trying to compute his immense debt to the Captain. The thin young man was evidently an authority on the sartorial side of the chase, as evidently he accepted Roddy as hall-marked. This was all encouraging, so far as it went. But it occurred to Roddy that he might be arousing an expectation difficult to satisfy later on. Too much might be demanded from a man who wore a Griffin boot!

The thin young man, who preferred to talk about himself in an odd jerky fashion, continued:

"We weigh in down here, but the goin', if you do go, puts the fear o' God into a man. Had a great gallop with old John, ten days ago, over as stiff a bit o' country as you ever saw. I'd sooner shove along there than here. Old John agrees with me."

Old John was the master of the crack pack in the Midlands.

The thin young man ended mournfully :

"These Foresters, of course, know their damned Forest. You aren't a Forester?"

"No."

"Take the Pundles——"

Roddy smiled. He was prepared to take one of them, on her own terms, too, and nearly said so.

"Know the Pundles?"

"I do."

"Amazin' family! Girls cut you down, b' Jove! Fling mud into your face. Get on or get out sort! The youngest——! You've not noticed her, perhaps?"

"I have."

"Prettiest of the bunch. Honeypot, what?"

"Quite."

"The Major is a card. He used to hunt with old John. Rode in the National."

"Did he?"

"Lord, yes. Hasn't he told you that? He will. A bad 'un to beat in his day."

"Is his day over?"

The thin young man looked puzzled.

"Why do you ask that? He'd throw a fit if he heard you."

"I was wondering," said Roddy tentatively, "what men like Major Pundle turned their attention to when their day *was* over."

"Just so. You can take it from me, that the 'best of the fun' is never quite over for them. They sit in

a chair and ride to a heel scent—pleasures of memory, eh ? ”

“ It is an obsession,” murmured Roddy, half to himself.

“ A——what ? ”

“ A ruling passion, I mean.”

“ That’s right. Are we going to have rain ? Shall I take out an apron ? ”

Roddy held his tongue. What was an apron ? Why had the Captain forgotten aprons ?

The thin young man sauntered away.

III

On his way to the meet, Roddy learned from Miss Kinsman the name of the thin young man, who, indeed, was “ shogging on ” just in front of them.

“ They call him ‘ The Bart.’ ”

“ A baronet ? ”

“ Sir Montagu Brambleby. He was down last year. They say——” she paused.

“ Yes ? ”

“ Forest gossip won’t interest you, sir.”

“ But it does. I talked with Sir Montagu after breakfast this morning. I took a shine to him. Can he ride ? ”

“ Oh, yes. I wonder whether he can do anything else.”

“ And this gossip ? ”

“ He is paying attention to Miss Diana Pundle.”

Roddy feared that he was blushing. He stole a furtive glance at Missy, who apparently was looking between Darling’s ears. She had ridden Darling regularly, and nothing untoward had happened so far. Nobody, of course, knew—except the Captain—that Roddy was paying attention to Di. It had not been marked attention. A sailor, let us say, was feeling his way through reefs. Perhaps “ the Bart.” steered a bolder

course. Roddy sorrowfully reflected that it must be so. And what chance could an authorized clerk have against a sporting baronet in a match between them *to be ridden out* to a finish beneath the eyes of the prize?

He shogged on in silence.

A minute previously Missy's hearty commendation of his kit had been as spikenard to the novice. She had said something pleasant about his more secure seat on Rescue. But Roddy had kept to himself the parts played by the Captain and the veteran of the riding school in his sporting education.

At the same time he had no intention of dissembling with a star performer. To her he must appear the very apex of a pyramid of duffers. To wean his thoughts from "the Bart." and Di, and sensible that his silence might be interpreted as distress by a very alert young woman, he said irrelevantly:

"Tell me what I don't know about buck hunting."

This, admittedly, was a generous order, a draft hastily presented, but not on that account to be dishonoured. Missy laughed.

"There ought," she observed, "to be a sort of small text book, price sixpence, that could be handed out."

"You must write it."

"I have set down a few 'Don'ts.' You can see them, if you like. They made dad laugh. But, to-day—well, you'll watch others?" Roddy nodded. "Keep away from the master and hounds. Give 'em a chance. If you get lost down wind you'll hear the horn. Up wind, as we were on that Saturday, you'll hear nothing. Buck hounds haven't the cry of fox hounds. Don't worry, you'll be all right."

They passed Ockley Wood, crossed the plain, walked through North Hentleys, up the hill beyond and on to the green facing the "Bird in Hand" inn. Missy joined Bert. The Captain espied Roddy. Tom Kinsman was not out.

The Captain "passed" the novice after vetting him meticulously. Across the green Roddy could see the Pundles and in the middle of them Sir Montagu Brambleby, mounted upon a big thoroughbred. "The Bart." was talking to Di.

"Your innings later," said the Captain, fully alive to the situation.

Ignoring this, Roddy said sharply: "You forgot my apron."

"Not I. Aprons aren't wanted for April showers. And I hate a mackintosh. You get wetter inside. Who mentioned aprons to you?"

"Sir Montagu Brambleby."

"He thinks too much about his own precious carcass. Di will find that out. On my word, Roddy, you look better than I thought you would outside a horse. Doswell's coat is a fit."

"If fine fittings made fine horsemen——!"

"Ah! they're coupling up the pack. That means a tuft. Sometimes they draw with the pack if a buck has been harboured apart from other deer."

Roddy watched the proceedings with lively interest, the more so because Rescue didn't fidget. Three men, in brown velveteens, were coupling up the pack. The tufters, hounds chosen for nose, tenacity and obedience, not for speed, were impatient at the delay. Harry explained to the novice that delay couldn't be avoided. The harbourer had to tell the master where the quarry lay. Other keepers in the Crown livery would give information about deer to be found on their respective beats. The better the information, the better the hunt, other things being equal. Roddy began to understand vaguely the object of tufting: to get a huntable buck well away from other deer.

"And the harder he's tufted, the better run we shall have when the pack's laid on. You come with me."

The master trotted down a ride, followed by five tufters. Beside him, on a shaggy pony, rode the harbourer. Some of the field remained with the pack.

Roddy was surprised to learn that buck hounds were merely big fox hounds entered to deer instead of fox. The Captain hoped that the novice would see a "gert" buck properly roused, always a thrilling sight so different from the uncarting of a tame stag.

Di cantered by with Sir Montagu cantering beside her. Roddy lifted his hat, forgetting that it was anchored to his coat. Di smiled at him. But she was smiling also upon "the Bart.," whose seat on his horse seemed to call for comment. Sir Montagu sat back in his saddle; his elbows stuck out aggressively; his long thin feet were turned out. The Captain enlightened him.

"Monty Brambleby wants people to look at him. But he's a thruster with hounds. Not a finished horseman. Our master don't stick his elbows out, and he carries his bridle hand low."

Roddy lowered his hands. The master had been the first gentleman jockey of his day.

IV

We leave Roddy for a moment and follow Diana and "the Bart." down the pleasant slopes leading to Hentleys, where three good bucks had been harboured. "The Bart." had keen vision, and his grey eyes, set far apart, saw more than was generally supposed, except when hounds were running. Then he gave undivided attention to them. A long thin nose of the aquiline variety drooped with a suggestion of melancholy towards a long thin chin. When he lifted his hat to ladies of his acquaintance, or when he viewed a fox, a high narrow brow might be noticed.

The smile that Di bestowed upon Roddy didn't escape "the Bart.'s" observation. His long thin nose

quivered as he scented a rival. Unconsciously, he may have sat farther back in the saddle and cocked his elbows at a more ridiculous angle as the sense of his own importance permeated agreeably every fibre of his being. At the moment he was beholding Di as mistress of Brambleby Hall. That was *the* test, previously applied to many young ladies. "The Bart.," indeed, had to see the future Lady Brambleby at the foot of his mahogany and also riding to hounds with old John. Old John happened to be just ahead of him, close to the master. And old John approved of the Pundle strain and touched his cap, metaphorically, to the Major. As an M.F.H. he was wearing a cap. "The Bart.," albeit of a pessimistic temperament, dared to hope that he might wear a similar cap some day. An' he did—so he confided to Di—he would make an ever-increasing field sit up and howl if they pressed hounds. Puck of the Forest of Ys must have grinned when he saw to it that two men, entirely different, intended to court Diana Pundle by making hound noises. "The Bart.," when it came to that, had a great advantage over Roddy. To horse and hound he could speak—eloquently.

He said banteringly :

"If I take over our hounds, would you like to come up and have a dart with them ? "

Di answered in the same spirit :

"I don't think I should be able to stand your language."

"The Bart." regarded this as an indictment.

"If you don't swear at followers, they run riot. Field has to be rated—same as hounds."

"I suppose so."

"It's a fact. The ignorance of fellows who do hunt can only be measured by the ignorance of those who don't. Who said the public was a hass ? "

"I don't know."

"Nor do I. Never mind! Last season we ran a fox into the garden of some misbegotten profiteer of the name of Lunn. We call him Sally Lunn. He made a fortune supplying inferior boots to our Tommies. I won't tell you what I think of the Government. Even *I* can't do that subject justice. Where was I?"

"In the garden of Mr. Sally Lunn."

"We killed in his confounded laurels, and broke up the fox on his lawn. He bundled out of his monstrosity of a house, in carpet slippers, and cursed us as trespassers. I took it upon myself to tell him to retire to his oven."

"Why his oven?"

"Because obviously Mr. Sally Lunn is half baked. Next day he wrote a letter to old John telling him in the ruddiest prose I ever read not to allow foxes to run near his bun shop, Marigold Towers! He believed that masters of hounds privately instructed foxes as to what line they took. Can you beat it?"

"I have no Roland ready for such an Oliver," said Di.

"The Bart." pulled up.

"Let's attend to business."

The harbourer was showing the master the spot where the bucks were grazing early that morning. Tufters hit the line within a minute, and spoke to it melodiously. "The Bart." said with enthusiasm:

"The first challenge of a good hound is the most thrilling sound in the world."

"Hark to Ravager!" said Di. "He used to lead the pack, but the pace is out of him, poor dear. A Belvoir hound, I think."

"I think not," said "the Bart." decidedly. "There's a bit o' smell about."

The words were hardly out of his mouth when the three bucks jumped up in sight of the field. "The Bart.'s" thoroughbred cocked his ears and trembled with excitement.

"They were lying down," said "the Bart.," almost as excited as his horse.

The bucks bounded on together, as the Captain explained to Roddy that it would be the master's duty to pick out the best of the three and separate him from his companions. This might or might not take time and trouble. Deer when roused seek other deer. But the trusty tufters stick patiently to the right line. The quarry may twist and ring; he may stir up some younger buck, and lie down in his place, but sooner or later, if the huntsman understands his craft, the buck will leave the deep woodlands and essay the open plain. Then the pack is laid on.

Upon this occasion the tuft was long and tedious. On Exmoor, only a privileged few are allowed to follow the tufters. In the Forest of Ys it is otherwise and not so wise. Often the master is handicapped by his field. He is hunting an animal craftier than a fox, in heavy timber over rough country, where the best horse cannot follow hounds. Again and again he has to depend upon his ears; and that is ever the psychological moment when those who should know better seize the opportunity to chatter. The Captain whispered to Roddy:

"Keep your eyes open and your mouth shut."

They cantered into Hentleys and round Hentleys. Rescue stood still without encouragement to do so, and justified his reputation as a rare doer. He ate heather, holly, dry sticks and dead leaves. And Roddy felt quite at home on him.

By the luck of things, our hero saw the hunted buck break cover. The Captain and he were standing upon a grass mound, overlooking woodland and plain. Here they had eaten their sandwiches and smoked cigarettes. The Captain had conscientious objections against pipes in the hunting field. Suddenly, the master burst out of an adjoining thicket, heated in mind and body, pestered

beyond endurance by his too zealous followers. His congested eyes rested upon Roddy, a stranger to him.

"Why the h—— can't you stand still, sir?"

The Captain replied sweetly:

"The gentleman has been standing still, Master, for at least half an hour."

The Master laughed.

"My mistake! Our buck is a ringer. And he's doing his best to diddle us. Shush—h—h!" He held up his hand.

The tufters could be heard just below them.

"There he is," said the Captain.

The buck trotted out of Hentleys some fifty yards to the right, paused for a moment, gazed about him, bethought him, possibly, of cooling waters far away, and sped across the plain.

"He's had a bit of a doing," said the Master. "Now we must stop hounds. And nobody," he added, "but ourselves to do it."

Roddy thought of the snug corner in the city club, where at this instant his father was finishing his luncheon. The Master rode off; the Captain followed; Rescue followed the Captain.

Lashes popped like pistols. "Hold hards" rent the air. The valiant Roddy shouted, as if he were on a quarter deck in a storm of wind, and tried to crack his whip. He succeeded in winding his lash securely round the flag of Rescue. Faith in that omnivorous doer became unshakable when this indignity was accepted without protest.

Tufters were stopped, not by Roddy.

The Master galloped away for the pack, as a whip emerged from Hentleys and took charge of Ravager and Co. They had earned their supper.

"I think," said the Captain, "that we are in for a hunt."

The "we" gave our hero pause.

CHAPTER VI

HALF A HUNT

I

FORESTERS dispute amongst themselves over the rival claims of fox hounds and buck hounds, and many years ago a wag drew an amusing cartoon to illustrate the perennial feud. A coach and four explained itself. The leaders were, respectively, the Masters of the two hunts, the wheelers were staunch supporters. The near leader was kicking the off leader; the wheelers were jibbing. Eminent Foresters on and in the coach appeared to be accepting the situation as inevitable. Progress, of course, was impossible.

Conditions are less stormy to-day. Nevertheless, there are bickerings and snarlings which might inspire another cartoonist. It is not easy to compare fox hunting and stag hunting. Many worthy people declare stag hunting to be cruel. All sport is cruel—especially fishing and butterfly catching. And yet fishing is not indicted. Why?

Long before the pack laid on, the field emerged from Hentleys. The more fortunate with two horses out exchanged mounts. Foot passengers hurried up from a hamlet hard-by. Motor cars appeared mysteriously from the back of beyond. A superman, wearing a motor coat and veil, approached the Master, as he trotted up, and waved a minatory forefinger. In a loud clear voice, she addressed him :

"You ought to be ashamed of yourself chasing a pretty deer."

"Is this a personal matter, madam?" he asked courteously.

Courtesy may be wasted on supermen.

"I came from Cronmouth to tell you what I thought of you."

"Thanks," he replied. "But I have not yet been chasing—you."

"That's the stuff to give the troops," said "the Bart."

Di Pundle was no longer with him. It is likely that she knew that business of supreme importance was engrossing Sir Montagu Brambleby. He had tightened his girths and thrown away a Quorn toothpick. The Major, not twenty feet away, was telling old John what he knew already—that the buck was heading for a distant enclosure full of deer.

"Sure to be trouble," said the Major.

"Trouble be damned," replied old John. "I'm sick of pottering about."

Di's sisters edged as near hounds as they dared. They never followed "father." Apart from the glory of taking their own line, they were unanimous in accusing their sire of being too clever. Upon rare occasions the Major's cleverness was justified. He might find himself alone with hounds, when they were running hard. And then it taxed all his pluck and knowledge of the Forest to live with them, a feat which he generally accomplished. The "whelps" obeyed the paternal injunction rubbed well in to plastic minds and eager hearts: "You stick to hounds, and don't ride in my pocket!"

Di—another significant fact—edged slightly away from hounds. A nice broad ride enticed her, safe galloping, if you didn't mind being plastered with mud. Half the field, at least, would thunder down this fairway,

and likely as not reach the distant enclosure before hounds.

She wondered what Roddy would do. At the same moment Roddy was deciding that the less Di saw of him when hounds were running the better. Upon the other hand, he was yearning to see more of her. He decided to follow at a discreet distance, a decision fortified by sound advice from the Captain.

"Keep out of the rough, if you can, old lad."

Roddy had a comfortable feeling in his bones and marrow that Rescue might be depended on to do this.

The big hounds—some of them twenty-six inches at the shoulder—hit the line with a reassuring crash. The Master turned in his saddle to address one remark to the Major.

"No cry, *you* said."

The Major—a bosom friend—answered imperturbably: "Liar'!"

Sixteen couple of the best were racing on. The thrusters kept well to the left, down wind. The less adventurous pushed hard along the ride, jostling each other, not without recrimination. A few followers elected to ride far to the right, where another enclosure lay like a soft mist upon the horizon. The gentleman on the bay pony was one of these. The bay pony did his three days a week, and was never sick or sorry, simply because a man of judgment "nursed" him.

Dirt flew into Roddy's face.

"Must look like a ploughed field," he thought.

He galloped through water.

"Shower bath, b' Jove!"

Not keeping his right distance, with both spurs (fortunately blunted) pricking Rescue's flanks, our hero narrowly escaped injury from a brute in front of him.

"Can't you see the danger signal?" shouted the rider of the brute, without apologizing.

Roddy saw, too late, the red bow, and took a pull on Rescue, who obediently fell into a trot. Roddy, always philosophical, thought to himself: "If the last shall be first, I may yet capture a slot."

A slot is the reward for valour.

Hounds never checked till they reached Crufters, the enclosure to the right. The buck, contrary to expectations, had not sought his fellows. In consequence, the hard-riding brigade on the left lost ground. The Captain reached hounds after Roddy.

The buck had turned at right-angles down the "gutter" (all small streams are gutters in the Forest of Ys) on his way to Bilkham. When hounds spoke to the line, the gentleman on the bay pony attempted to keep the field in order.

"Hold hard! Please! Hounds will tell us which way he has gone."

Hounds did.

Roddy was now amongst trees again, and not too happy. Rescue took excellent care of him. Together they found a ride.

Forrard! Forrard!

Di's blue habit was fifty yards in front. Roddy decided that his lady love was riding with judgment. The other "whelps" formed a different opinion. The more daring followers disdained the rides and jumped half a dozen blind ditches. "The Bart.," before leaving Crufters, came to grief, because the thoroughbred had his head up, looking for hounds instead of rabbit holes. Old John said derisively: "Give you sixpence for that hat."

Roddy, beholding the hat, understood Tom Kinsman's concern when he saw a customer about to take the Forest bareheaded.

On and on, skirting Bilkham, across Stagherd Bottom, to the high burnt heather beyond.

Scent failed on the burnt ground. Once more Roddy found himself on terms with hounds, thanks to the gentleman on the bay pony. Presently a halloa told the Master that the hunted buck had crossed the Ringfield road. The moment hounds touched heather again they owned the scent. Roddy pressed on. He was near hounds, he was in the middle of many followers. And yet, within five minutes, he realized, to his consternation, that he was—lost. He could hear nothing and see nothing. So he took a pull at his flask. Rescue solaced himself with a mouthful of gorse.

Lost !

Not an agreeable experience for a novice.

“Half a hunt,” mused a philosopher, “is better than a whole tuft.”

The manger-loving Rescue laid a true course for Puddenhurst. Presently Roddy heard Missy hailing him. She cantered up.

“Lost ? ”

“Not now,” Roddy replied.

“How did it happen ? ”

“Well, they vanished, Miss Kinsman. I was about dead lag of the hunt. No complaints. How did you find me ? ”

Missy explained.

“They are in to fresh deer over there,” she pointed down wind. “My mare has had enough, so I left them. I thought I might find you.”

Was Missy blushing ? A touch of east in the wind brings a livelier pink into a maiden’s cheeks.

“Rescue,” said Roddy gaily, “has hardly turned a hair, but I’m stiff as——”

“As a beaten fox,” said Missy.

II

The hunt was over for these two, but Roddy learned before dinner time that he hadn’t missed much. A

sharp shower of rain made scent catchy ; a fast hunt became slow. The buck diddled the Master eventually.

Roddy enjoyed his ride home with Missy. Astride her mare, erect in the pigskin, she talked exactly like an intelligent boy. A man of insatiable curiosities lured her on to tell of the tricks in her father's trade.

" Beaning now—you've heard of beaning ? "

" I've heard of beanos, not beaning."

" There used to be a gang . . . dad called them the Forty Thieves, a sort of syndicate of rascals. They worked the fairs in lots of four or five. You see it's easy to pick up a slightly lame horse cheap. He may have incipient navicular or anything. He goes short on the near fore. If you stick a small pebble under his off fore shoe, he'll go lame on that foot. Then he trots true because one slightly lame foot balances the other. A vet would find out the trick, but at fairs customers with a bit o' drink in them are easily fooled. They like the looks of a horse, and buy him because he's cheap. If they talk about vets, the owner gingers them up by swearing that he can sell the horse to another customer just round the corner. A young farmer, say, buys the horse without a warranty and pays cash. Before he gets away from the fair, one of the gang puts him wise. The young farmer knows he's been had. He cuts his loss quick, and quite right too, drops a tanner perhaps, and says nothing. Dad says: 'Advertise everything except folly.' "

Roddy was much edified.

Missy was encouraged to continue.

" There was the case of Ramrod——"

" Tell me about Ramrod."

Missy chuckled.

" Ramrod passed through our hands once. He was a real beauty to look at, but gone in his wind—roared like a bull. The Forty Thieves got hold of Ramrod.

Dad says they sold him and bought him back a score of times—regular gold mine.”

“Sold a bad roarer?”

Missy said solemnly:

“They used to give Ramrod a purgative forty-eight hours before taking him to a fair. No food. And then at the last moment an ounce of shot.”

“An ounce of shot?”

“Lead. Sulphate of lead would have done the trick, but shot does quite as well. Lead stops roaring for about an hour. A horse like Ramrod could be sold cheap in five minutes.

“This is illuminating,” said Roddy.

“Isn’t it? The world is full of fools. There was a tiny pony, a Shetland, exhibited at Puddenhurst. Everybody paid tuppence to see the smallest pony in the world—five years old. Dad saw that it was two years old. The milk teeth of a two-year-old might be taken for the second teeth of a five-year-old. The man who exhibited the pony didn’t know the difference. He was furious with dad, offered to bet him a hundred pounds. They did bet twenty about it, which shows the owner of the pony didn’t know. Dad called in our vet, Sebastian Eddols. Milk teeth are quite different if you know, smoother, no striations, broader than they are long. Dad won his bet, and got his money.”

“Fun at the Fair,” said Roddy.

“Now,” said Missy, “it’s your turn, sir, to tell me something about Zeebrugge.”

“You heard I had been there?”

“Captain Slufter told me.”

Roddy, nothing loath, talked of Zeebrugge, but, much to Miss Kinsman’s annoyance, he omitted to mention what he had done there.

They reached Puddenhurst at four.

III

After a "boil" in a big bath, Roddy stretched himself out in his armchair, warmed his toes opposite a good fire, and indulged in pleasant reverie. He could only recall one regrettable incident. A fallen tree trunk blocked a ride in Hentleys. Rescue hopped over it. Roddy lost his hat and both stirrups. The hat dangled halfway down his back and fishing for stirrups was a new and disconcerting form of sport. Nobody saw this misadventure. Roddy pulled up Rescue, thrust his feet well home into the irons, and jammed the Billy Coke hat hard on to his head. Later on, he negotiated a small ditch more or less triumphantly.

His thoughts soon left himself and took a swallow's flight to Di. He had been asked by the Major to dine that night at Pundle Green. Roddy would have accepted the invitation with greater alacrity if the gallant Major had left out the last half of a sentence, and uncommonly like a sentence it sounded to our hero.

"Pot-luck, Selwin, eight sharp, and Monty Brambleby will spin you over in his car."

"I'm up against it," thought Roddy.

Being a sportsman, albeit a sad novice in the hunting field, he had to admit that "the Bart." was a customer to be reckoned with. In the eyes of Diana Pundle, Sir Montagu Brambleby must be—IT, although there was nothing epicene about him. Would he wear "pink" dining with an ex-master of hounds? Would Di be placed next to him at dinner?

"Damn these baronets," said Roddy moodily.

And if hunting were the sole topic of conversation, as appeared likely, a novice would have to run mute. These sad thoughts and misgivings were put to flight by a sharp rap on the door.

"Come in."

"The Bart." entered, in gorgeous dressing-gown and slippers, red of face, and smoking a pipe. It was a treat to notice that the good fellow took for granted that he was heartily welcome.

"Promised to give you a lift to Pundle Green," he said.

"I'm much obliged," replied Roddy. "Won't you sit down?"

"The Bart." did so, stretching out his long thin legs to the fender.

"Ever dined there?"

"Not yet."

"We shall get good oats all right, and a glass or two of sound port afterwards. Probably bubbly. Didn't see you when we lost our deer."

It was then that Roddy learned, at some length, that he hadn't missed much. "The Bart." touched lightly upon the humours of the chase, using that diction which is calculated to fill the minds of novices with envy. Obviously Monty prided himself upon a copious vocabulary.

"Lot o' rum 'uns out. One old gal was ridin' a nag with a dropped lip. Told her it was due to pressure on nerves of zygomatic arch. Might have been talkin' choctaw for all she understood. Never saw so many women ridin' astride, but there's no leppin' down here. Where do you hunt?"

"Capel Court."

"The Bart." laughed.

"Stock Exchange, what? Not my game! I'm a whole-hogger. I agree with Whyte-Melville. The greatest thing in life to me is a good day with hounds. And the next best thing is an indifferent day. Can't beat that for a plain statement."

"Impossible," said Roddy politely. He added, as an afterthought: "It doesn't do to rub it in to the ladies."

"Lord, no! I don't object to women huntin', if they hold their tongues when hounds throw up, but I do say to myself when I see one of the fair on a clinker: 'A good man is goin' without.'"

"Just so," assented Roddy. His eye brightened. This was not the sort of talk to please a Pundle "whelp." As if reading his thoughts, "the Bart." added hastily:

"Mustn't say that to-night, what? But there are exceptions. The Pundle girls are dashers, especially the youngest. And keen as mustard! A lot of women come out with old John. He can put 'em in their place. Three weeks ago last Tuesday, he and the hunt servants were thrown out. When old John galloped up, not in the best o' tempers, I'm damned if a woman wasn't standing up in her stirrups and wavin' the pack on with her hat!!!"

"Not to be borne," said Roddy.

"Old John dealt with the vixen. 'What the blazes are you doin', ma'am?' he asked. 'Are you feedin' chickens?'"

Roddy laughed, but "the Bart." became solemn.

"Women," he affirmed, "are gettin' out o' hand. Friend o' mine, my hostess too, came out partridge drivin' last November with two poms. Stood with me behind my hurdle during the best drive of the day, and I was bang in the middle. Birds comin' along in swarms. Those Poms ran out in front and barked! I nearly gave them a barrel apiece. Birds flew to right and left of me, over the other guns. Disgraceful!"

He wiped his high narrow brow with a silk handkerchief.

"That awful woman," growled "the Bart." in conclusion, "has two poms and nary a baby. She cheats at bridge."

"You are rather down on the sex."

"No," said "the Bart." frowning, "no. Certainly

not. But it makes a fellow, who has a place and all that, scratch his head, eh ? ”

Roddy nodded.

“ Because,” pursued Sir Montagu, with greater intensity, “ when I take a look at myself, shavin’, I know that I’m not gettin’ younger or more beautiful. My next o’ kin is a rotter, a sit-in-a-covered-car, colour-o’-skilly, wind-your-wool, stinkin’-o’-scent cove, whom I’d love to hang at Brambleby Hall on my weasel and stoat tree. Between ourselves, I’ve got to find the right sort before I break my neck. Nearly did it to-day.”

“ Nearly found the right sort, to-day ? ”

“ The Bart.’s ” sanguine complexion assumed a richer tint.

“ Nearly broke my neck, I mean.”

“ I quite understand,” said Roddy.

IV

Two necks might have been broken between Puddenhurst and Pundle Green, if a pony or a pig had happened to be lying on the King’s highway, as often is the case in Arcadia after dark. And it was dark. “ The Bart.” drove his high-powered car at top speed regardless of the sanctity of life or the damage to tyres upon a rough, flinty surface. Roddy inferred that Jehu drove furiously under the goad of mental excitement. He came to the conclusion that Sir Montagu Brambleby went fast at his fences and all other objectives. He was racing at Di Pundle.

However they reached Pundle Green without misadventure.

The house, a rambling building, lies rather low in some park-like ground studded with fine trees. When the “ cit.’s ” daughter brought a plum to the Forest of Ys, part of it was spent upon a notable addition to an otherwise comfortable manor house. Several lofty Georgian rooms were built and a second set of stables. Approach-

ing the house by the carriage drive from the north, a stranger would have said: "This is a mansion of pretension." Looking at the house from the lawns and garden the same man might have remarked: "This isn't a house, it's a street." A trained eye could detect half a dozen houses of different orders of architecture, none of them good. But Time had amalgamated and co-ordinated everything till the general effect was homogeneous. But a thrifty soul might have murmured: "I'm glad I don't have to keep those roofs in order."

A butler, as imperturbable of countenance as the Major, ushered the visitors into a fine inner hall, embellished with trophies of the chase, including the finest collection of "heads," both of fallow and red deer, to be found in the Forest of Ys. Below these were innumerable portraits of hunters and race horses.

"The Bart." slipped out of his leather coat, and revealed himself at his best in the "pink" of old John's famous Hunt. Roddy, in dinner jacket and black tie, meekly followed Sir Montagu into the saloon.

The Major, also in pink, received his guests—there were no others—with a smile twinkling in his shrewd eyes. His "whelps" were dear to him, although he rated them in right good Victorian fashion. But he held the opinion, inherited from the General, that marriage, a marriage with proper settlements, was woman's avocation. He had asked two young fellows to dine, and meant to do them well, because he regarded them as "eligible." The obsolete adjective is still in common use in the Forest of Ys.

Mrs. Pundle had realized early in life that marriage is a partnership likely to prosper if the dominant partner is allowed a free hand. Being a Forester, one of the Mottisfont of Hernshaw, she loved moss. Out of the moss that encrusted her shone a placid, sensible face, the face that brightens the lives of others, especially

if those lives happen to be troublous. She thought, or had come to think, that Omniscience had been kind to her. Omniscience, certainly, when showering blessings upon her, had not withheld a sense of gratitude.

They went in to dinner.

Above the sideboard, upon which glittered a dozen handsome cups won by the Major at horse shows and point-to-point meetings, hung a portrait of General Pundle carrying the horn of the Forest of Ys Fox Hounds, a portrait painted by Richmond and presented by the Hunt Club. "The Bart." gazed at it, much impressed. To Roddy's amusement, and also to his edification, the Major embarked upon a long panegyric of his sire. A more cynical guest than Roddy might have hazarded the conjecture that the father of four handsome girls was expatiating upon "strain."

Respectfully, not cynically, we hark to the General's son.

"A rare old boy," said the Major. "Try that sherry, Monty, *he* laid it down. Yes, a clinker. I can see him now coming down to family prayers on huntin mornings without his boots, in white silk stockings. He used to kneel on this chair and roar out: 'All in?' The first whip, I mean our old butler, would answer: 'All in, sir.' And then he'd rattle over the course to rights. Once he broke off in the middle of a psalm—always had a psalm—to rate the maids. 'Why the hell don't you respond?' They threw their tongues after that, I can tell you. In the evening it used to be cards to prayers and prayers to cards. Loved his game of whist! At breakfast, we children had to stick our paws on the tablecloth. If you bit your nails, no allowance, no sixpence. A marvel! Never allowed me to swear, did all that himself. If I said 'damn' my mouth was washed out with yellow soap and water. I can taste that soap still. You ought to have seen him in the harness room. He used to pull down the four-

in-hand tack, and take it to pieces, unbuckle every strap! I had to put it together. If a bit of stitching was needed, he never said a word to a groom. Not he! He'd take a saddle off its peg, hurl it into a corner, and let his men find out what was amiss."

"The Bart." nodded.

"This sherry tells me what sort of cove he was. Bristol milk! Damn degenerate age, we live in, what?" Catching Mrs. Pundle's motherly eye, he added hastily: "Any of that yellow soap left? If there is, I'll let Miss Di wash out my mouth with pleasure."

Di blushed. The Major said heartily.

"Couldn't afford it now, Monty. "My girls say 'damn.' I don't like it, but there you are. All our perks, as males, have been pinched."

"Hear! Hear!" said Monty.

The Major addressed Roddy.

"And what d'ye think of our Forest?"

Roddy said what he thought in language that slightly arrested the Major's attention. The Pundles used a sort of dialect of their own which to non-hunting listeners almost called for a glossary. Roddy, speaking of Arcadia, used phrases which, subconsciously, he may have borrowed from Thomas Hardy whom he regarded as our first novelist. Warming to his work, sensible that Di was listening, open eyed, he quoted the Wessex historian:

"The Bart." pricked up his ears.

"Hardy said that? Not the Tom Hardy I know, who used to go like a bird."

"I mean Thomas Hardy, the novelist."

The Major, in his time, had known everybody and everything. He, too, nodded.

"Thomas Hardy, the novelist. There's a big monument to him down Casterbridge way, reg'lar landmark."

"Is there?" asked Roddy.

"Why not?"

"Well—er—it seems, doesn't it? a rummy thing to put up a big monument to a man in his lifetime."

"I've seen it," said the Major positively.

Di smiled. In a deprecating, soft voice, she said quietly:

"I think, father, that the monument you saw was put up a hundred years ago to another Thomas Hardy, Nelson's Hardy."

"Of course," said Roddy, delighted with Di, and turning to her. "'Kiss me, Hardy,' the captain of the *Victory*."

"Um!" growled the Major. "The monument is there all right. I can swear to that."

Mrs. Pundle changed the conversation.

V

Sir Montagu sat beside his hostess, and on his right sat Di. Again the cynic may suggest that design governed this arrangement. Roddy sat opposite Di, between two of her sisters. This had its compensations. Roddy could see Di's face. Happily there are hundreds of such faces still to be found in the remoter rural districts. But they are not easy to describe. They suggest fields ripe for the sickle that the Lord has blessed, not the white sales of our huge emporia. The Major had never offered his daughters a choice between a London season and a season's hunting. He couldn't afford both. And he—and his father before him—held in disdain dwellers in cities. Foresters rarely leave the Forest. Despite this, Diana Pundle was not wholly Arcadian, although Virgil might have penned her portrait in enchanting hexameters. There was nothing bovine about her. She looked and was a nymph of the glades and bracken, elusive, still shy, but racy of the soil. This raciness is an attribute of the Wessex peasantry. Di had a touch of their peculiar

humour, more than a touch, possibly, of their philosophical acceptance of life as it is lived in secluded byways. The Major had not sent his "whelps" to school. Mrs. Pundle had chosen an excellent governess, a gentlewoman, who taught her pupils much that is not included in an up-to-date curriculum.

During dinner "the Bart." talked "at" not "to" Diana, which may have amused her as it did Roddy. Monty exhibited himself as an entertaining amalgam of modesty and swank. He was modest, indeed apologetic, in expressing opinions upon subjects (and objects, like novelists), beyond his ken. He deferred to the Major when a J.P. discoursed upon the parish pump. He inclined his head when Mrs. Pundle warbled her native woodland notes. The dear lady was the first to hear the cuckoo, the last to take leave of the swallow. Finding a primrose in December, or a celandine in early February caused her soul to sing within her. But "the Bart." displayed little modesty when he transported himself and the company to Brambleby Hall.

"No place to touch it," he declared.

"Elizabethan?" queried Roddy.

"What? No, thank God! I mean a lot more than that. My crib is within reach of six packs of hounds. And some of the cream of the country belongs to me. Not a strand of wire in my fences after the First of November. If there's any nonsense from Saint Peter when I knock at the door, I shall mention that."

"Men with less to their credit will be there," said the Major trenchantly.

"We can take care of ourselves out huntin'," continued "the Bart.", "but women, nice plucky girls, goin' free at their leps, as I like to see 'em goin', and cuttin' themselves to ribands——! Bad biz! Anyway no woman will come to that grief on my land."

"Have you much land?" asked Di, innocently.

"I'm land poor. But I refuse to sell an acre. Yes; five thousand of the best in a ring fence! The house is a jolly fat square of a place, central heating, electric light, hot and cold, and a hearty welcome for the right sort. Champagne? Please."

"The Bart." repeated "Champagne? Please," several times, saying towards the end of dinner:

"After a hunt a man likes his bottle of wine."

Roddy quoted Sheridan:

"Do you prefer the decanter after dinner to the canter before luncheon?"

"Good!" said the Major. "Your own, Selwin?"

"Sheridan's."

"Yes, yes, the fellow who wrote plays. I know. 'School for something-or-other.'"

"Scandal, Father," said Di.

"Right! B' Jove! There's no school for scandal like the hunting field. I could tell some stories——"

"Later, dear," suggested Mrs. Pundle.

Roddy had his innings with Di in the saloon, but the poor fellow believed that he was ingratiating himself with the maid when he asked solicitously after her new horse.

"Sammy is quite all right, Mr. Selwin. Father is riding him to-morrow."

"Is he in the book?"

"He is. Sir Montagu admires him immensely."

"I look forward to the pleasure of seeing you on Sammy, cutting down Sir Montagu."

Di looked pensive.

"I've never owned a horse like Sammy. Father gave a hundred and fifty for him. He says I'm the luckiest young woman in the Forest. It was luck my coming into my old aunt's money. She was my god-mother but," she lowered her voice discreetly, "she was also Tommy's godmother."

"Tommy?"

Di explained. The eldest of the "whelps" ought, of course, to have been a boy. She was duly baptized Janetta (after the aunt) but a disappointed sire called her Tommy before she was shortcoated. Encouraged by Roddy's sympathetic smiles, Di became even more confidential. The old aunt, it seemed, boasted a small beard.

"She looked like a witch, Mr. Selwin. We children were terrified of her. But Tommy is afraid of nothing. Tommy, when she was ten years old, pulled Aunt Janetta's beard."

"What audacity!"

"Wasn't it? But it cost poor Tommy five thousand pounds. Hard luck on Tommy, but good luck for me. Do you think that luck, good luck, must be paid for?" she asked anxiously.

"You mean—the doctrine of compensation?"

"Ye—es." Her voice sank again: "Sammy might even things up. He *is* a customer."

"I'm dead sure," murmured Roddy, "that you, Miss Diana, can ride anything."

"I haven't Tommy's nerve, Mr. Selwin. When I was three years old I took a bad toss off my rocking-horse. It reared up and fell backwards. I have never been quite the same since."

Sincerity informed her clear tones, and between her eyes a vertical line shewed itself and vanished. Notwithstanding this, Roddy, fatuous youth, leaped to the conclusion that the Major's youngest daughter was plucky as well as lucky—and modest as a daisy. Daisies—and this little natural history fact has never been pointed out before—are immodest. They present themselves with unblushing effrontery on tennis lawns, where they are not wanted. Anxious to please, determined to "cut down" "the Bart." over a country obviously unfamiliar to the owner of Brambleby Hall, Roddy rode with loose rein through Market Harborough, the

book not the town. He had spent an hour with Whyte-Melville before dinner. Why did he abandon Wessex and Thomas Hardy? For twenty minutes an infatuated young man discoursed upon Mr. Sawyer, the Honourable Crasher and Miss Dove. In Parson Dove's daughter he had recognized a Victorian prototype of Diana Pundle.

"Wonderful book," he concluded.

"Is it? I have not read it, Mr. Selwin."

Roddy stared at her in astonishment. His feelings may be compared with those of a sometime huntsman in the Forest of Ys, who, after a twenty minutes burst with *fox hounds* discovered that he was hunting a *deer*.

When Di went to bed, she said to Tommy:

"Mr. Selwin is as keen about hunting as Sir Monty."

Tommy, a good fellow, laughed.

"They are both keen on you, Di."

CHAPTER VII

EM'LY

I

TOM KINSMAN bought horses here, there and everywhere, but often he heard of them in the snug room behind the bar of the "Bell Inn," Puddenhurst. The "Bell" stood handy to The Yard, and the proprietress, Mrs. Chaundy, was a friend of Tom's and a remarkable woman in her way. Perhaps her late husband, during his lifetime, had exhibited himself as an object lesson of how not to run a small hotel. He scowled at his guests; he forced down their throats unpalatable food; he fleeced them unhandsomely. Without his wife he would have ended an inglorious career in the bankruptcy court. When he was laid to rest in the Puddenhurst cemetery, his widow dropped tears into an open grave and wondered afterwards why she dropped them. She said to Tom: "If one had to be taken better him than me." This opinion, shared by Tom, was strengthened when the disorder of the dead man's affairs engrossed the gossips. Tom, however, came to the rescue. He advanced a round sum of money without security other than firm faith in Mary Chaundy's executive ability.

Mrs. Chaundy evoked order out of chaos. Gallic methods were unknown to her, but instinctively she practised those little arts that please customers and inspire valedictory enthusiasms. French *restaurateurs* and hotel keepers adopt one golden rule: *The customer*

is never in the wrong. If he complains of a dish, care is taken that his palate be tickled by something else. The *maitre d'hôtel* is desolated because the beef is tough, but the *fricandeau* will be of a ravishing tenderness. . . ! In France, too, the wives and children of inn-keepers have a vested interest in the business and they give to it undivided attention.

Mary Chaundy must have had a tincture of French blood in her veins. Tom observed that her welcoming smile was worth five hundred a year. She was the first in a moss-grown village to cater for the *char-à-banc* trade. Half a dozen of these crowded conveyances may be seen every afternoon opposite the "Bell." They disgorge trippers who want afternoon tea at a shilling a head. Mrs. Chaundy's teas are famous. After six stronger refreshment is called for. Farmers and bagmen came to the "Bell" because Mrs. Chaundy reigned supreme in her kitchen. Public dinners were held in an annexe behind the inn, and, after the war, weekly dances at popular prices. Behind the bar a brace of barmaids earned good salaries, supplemented by tips. Mrs. Chaundy was particular about her barmaids.

"I've no use for hussies," she confided to Tom, "but I pick bright girls, not too young and beautiful, who can hold their own with customers. Some of my girls, as you know, have married from my house."

"The Wedding Bell," said Tom, who on principle kept out of the bar, preferring the privacy of the room at the back. He seldom spoke of principles, saying jocosely :

"When a man jaws about his principles he's just thinking of his interests."

Mary Chaundy believed Tom Kinsman to be a widower. When the dealer established himself in Puddenhurst, she helped to "mother" Missy, cutting out three spinsters of uncertain ages and tempers who

were sharpening axes of their own and attempting to gain Tom's gratitude under false pretences. Missy disdained their advances. But she loved Mary Chaundy.

II

Tom had stepped over to the "Bell" to sample a "parcel" of vintage port bought by Mrs. Chaundy from a farmer near Ringfield. The farmer—so Mary told Tom—had made a "turn" in oil just before the war, securing on sound advice a block of shares. To his consternation he discovered forty-eight hours afterwards that the shares were five pounds each and not one pound. In fine, he found himself with an investment five times bigger than he had intended. Luck favoured him. The shares were moving briskly upward. Ultimately a handsome profit justified the purchase of a pipe of port. That again trebled in value.

"He's sold one-third," said Mrs. Chaundy, "and gets what's left free, gratis and for nothing."

Tom sipped and smiled.

"I'll have some, Mary, if the price is all right."

"You know that it will be all right to you."

Tom eyed her affectionately. In his eyes the proprietress of the "Bell" was a lady of distinction, invariably well groomed, neat as a new pin early in the morning and late at night. She was proud of a tall slender figure and a face that indicated kindness and resolution.

Tom nodded.

"Things have been coming my way, Mary. We'll say five dozen."

"Fine wine," murmured Mrs. Chaundy. "1908. I don't know the name of the shipper. All the better for keeping."

"I shan't keep it, my dear. Drink the best and then you have it. I've lost a pot of money keeping good horses too long. I hold, as you do, with quick turns.

In this valley of the shadow nothing is a cert. except the coffin round the corner."

Mrs. Chaundy had two children, a son and a daughter. The voice of the little daughter was heard piping shrilly a hymn : " As shepherds watched their flocks by night."

" Rosie sings hymns nicely," said Mrs. Chaundy.

Rosie, evidently, had catholic tastes in music for an instant afterwards she sang with even greater gusto : " 'it 'im on the 'ead with a poker."

Tom laughed uproariously.

" Gosh ! Out of the mouths of babes and sucklings —! Just when a man is too cocksure that the Shepherd *is* watching over him he gets one on the boko with a sandbag."

" Yes ; that's life," said Mary Chaundy.

Tom rose to leave the parlour. Horses had gone on to the Tuesday meet at Hernshaw. Tom intended to slip over in his car. At this time of year it paid him to keep in touch with the gentlemen from the Shires, likely to lame a horse unaccustomed to ruts and clay holes and as likely to replace him with a hireling. Some of Tom's horses didn't belong to him. The dealer had a satisfactory arrangement with a Sherton Abbas dealer who sent hirelings to Puddenhurst, when hunting stopped in the Blackmoor Vale.

He passed through the bar and into the street.

He reeled into the street.

Nobody saw him but the Puddenhurst " softy " who stood on his head to amuse the trippers and made grimaces (paid for in copper) at the young women.

Behind the bar Tom had perceived a female whom he recognized as his wife.

He had been sandbagged !

III

He reached the office, thanking God that Missy was at least five miles away. Missy was getting almost too

sharp, and insistent that questions should be answered truthfully. Tom had come to the conclusion that he, at any rate, couldn't "flimflam" Missy.

Of course he might have pretended that Mrs. Chaundy's port was too potent.

His wife had grinned at him with diabolical malevolence.

He sat down, trembling, to compose his mind.

What struck him forcibly was the change in the woman. She had preserved, under a coat of powder and paint, some of her looks. It was impossible to believe that she had been ill.

"What a liar!" gasped Tom, as he lay back in his chair.

No change there. Em'ly had always been a liar. No; the change in her was something which a wiser man than Tom might have found difficult to analyse. Evil leered out of her big bold eyes.

"Possessed of a devil!" growled Tom.

A strapper interrupted these interjectional remarks:

"Will you be wanting the car?"

"I don't want the car, my lad, and I don't want you. Shift! And, mind, I'm not to be disturbed. Important biz. If anybody less than the Prince of Wales asks to see me, you can say I'm not at home."

"Yessir."

Bit by bit, doggedly, facing all the facts, the dealer pieced together a reasonable hypothesis. Em'ly was "out" for blackmail. Probably she had answered an "ad." of Mrs. Chaundy's. She was clever enough to answer it plausibly. He remembered that Mary had advertised for a capable barmaid in *The Western Gazette*, because she liked West Country people.

"I'd like to have it out with her now."

He glanced savagely at the rack that held his whips, old friends some of them.

"Must get this off my chest."

Nobody was in the bar, except Em'ly. It opened to

the public at twelve, just when hounds would be throwing off at Hernshaw Magna. Tom glanced at the heavy gold watch which had belonged to his father. It had timed many a plater in mile trials.

It was ten to twelve.

As he passed through the bar into the street the door had clicked behind him. To get back into the bar, he would have to pass through the parlour. It was unlikely that Mary would be there alone.

"I'll have a dash at it."

His eye lingered on a cutting whip. Tom didn't "hold" with using whip or spur going at a fence. If a horse dropped a leg into the far ditch, or got over clumsily, he must be corrected sharply. Two or three "stingers" served to make him more careful when negotiating the next obstacle.

The cutting whip was left on the rack.

Tom strode through the yard, making hastily for the back door of the "Bell Inn." There he encountered Rosie, the cantatrice.

"Where's mother?"

"Gone," said Rosie.

Tom held out sixpence.

"I left something in the back parlour, kiddie. I'll just pop in and get it. You needn't tell mother."

Rosie nodded. She had no intention of telling mother that she had business of urgent private importance at the sweet shop across the way.

Tom tip-toed into the parlour and thence into the bar beyond.

Em'ly was polishing glasses.

"And how is my old darling?" she asked pertly. "A little bird told me you'd be back soon. Got a kiss for a loving wife?"

"Aren't you the limit?" asked Tom.

"Not yet, dear. Considering everything, I'm far from the limit. I saw my daughter prancing up the

street not an hour ago. She doesn't get her looks from you, Tom."

"Come off it," growled Tom. "There's no time to waste. When did you come here?"

"Day before yesterday. Any objections? I have to earn my living, you know. I'm quite on my own."

"What's the game? Let's get down to business."

"Yes," said Em'ly, "if you call business a game."

Tom observed grimly:

"Business between me an' you, Em'ly, is the game of 'Put and Take.' I put and you take."

"What do you put?"

"I'll pay ex's, and give you a tanner."

"Nothing doing, Mr. Kinsman. I don't wonder a pincher like you is so rich."

"I'm not rich."

"I know all about you and the kid. She wants a mother to look after her."

"What d'ye mean?"

"She's getting talked about. There's more talk than beer served in this bar. My mother didn't allow me to go riding all over Melshire with young naval officers."

Tom scowled at her.

"Margery can take care of herself. Cut Margery out. This is a deal. What's your price to skin out of Puddenhurst and leave my girl and me alone for ever and ever, Amen?"

Em'ly was prepared to reply promptly. But she was in ignorance of one important fact. It had never occurred to her that Margery believed her to be dead. Had she known this, she would have raised her price.

"I want a hundred pounds."

"You may get it, and you may not. I must let this soak in. Meantime——?"

"Meantime, I'm just the new barmaid, Emily Green. Green is my colour, dear."

Tom left her on the stroke of twelve.

IV

He returned to the office, a disgusted man. Common sense urged him to tell Missy the wretched story. Sentiment pulled him in the opposite direction. It was characteristic of Tom Kinsman that where women were concerned common sense, as a rule, overpowered sentiment. But Missy happened to be the exception. Probably he had never attempted to measure his pride in and affection for Missy. Love is hardly measurable, unless it be cupboard love.

Leaving a decision in abeyance, an anxious father frowned as he recalled the hateful suggestion that his daughter was being talked about. Certainly he would have agreed with the Major that the hunting field was a school for scandal.¹ Tom loved a bit of gossip, but he was shocked to learn that gossip dared to make free with his ewe lamb.

The allusion pointed directly at the Commander.

And he, the doting father, had told Missy to keep her eye on that young man. By this time, Tom was aware that Rodney Selwin had left the Royal Navy, and was "something" in the city. He might be "something," but obviously he was not "somebody."

He had cottoned to the young fellow.

"Rotten world," growled Tom, "rotten!"

Could he tell Missy to withdraw her kindly protection from the novice? Immediately, the girl would put embarrassing questions. She would ask where such odious gossip had started.

"Bogged down," reflected Tom. "Bang in it up to the girths!"

He made an indifferent dinner, gulping down his food, which meant indigestion to follow. A dock glass of port with his cheese helped matters a little. Em'ly would have to mark time. She ought to be "doing" it. Any precipitancy on her part would defeat its own

ends. Nevertheless—from his knowledge of her, she was capable of “going off the deep end” if he ignored her too long.

“She’s put it across me to rights, she has.”

At half past two Missy and Roddy rode into The Yard, and they made a couple upon which the uncensorious eye could rest with pleasure.

“No scent at all,” said Missy, as she slipped out of the saddle after throwing a neat leg over Darling’s neck. Darling was being ridden carefully every day, and was furnishing up again. Roddy remained upon Tipperary.

“Put my saddle on to Timbuctoo,” said Missy to a strapper.

“Whatever for?” asked Tom.

“We’ve done nothing, dad. I was going to take Mr. Selwin up to the school. He wants to try Tipperary over a fence or two.”

“I suppose it’s all right,” grumbled Tom.

“Of course it’s all right. And when I come back I want to show Mr. Selwin my *Don’ts*. Can you lay your hand on the copy I gave you?”

“I daresay I can,” said Tom.

Roddy observed earnestly:

“Miss Kinsman has been most awfully good to me. I’m under tremendous obligations to her.”

“Matter of business,” said Tom. “Don’t mention it.”

He went back to the office.

V

The virtue of hot fomentations nearly despatched him to his dining-room, because he had seen in Missy’s face a joy in life he had not noticed before. She had beamed at him. . . . Why?

Tom smote his desk so violently that the ink splashed out of the inkpot.

"My gosh! I believe he's taken a shine to her, and she to him."

For the second time that eventful day Tom Kinsman trembled with excitement. It says much for Roddy's ingenuous face that such a man as this horse-dealer, coming as he did into daily contact with rogues of the most variegated description, never questioned our hero's honesty and good faith. It was impossible to behold Roddy as a dirty dog "on the loose."

"Got to mother Missy now."

Mothering began with retrospection. Missy was nineteen and old for her years. He had never detected in her what he called "nonsense." Indeed, he thought of her as a cool customer, contemptuous of the darts of Cupid. He had wondered, more than once, whether he had educated the child above her station in life. Certainly she disdained the advances made by "boys" in Puddenhurst. The strappers adored her—at a respectful distance.

He remembered what Mrs. Chaundy had said that morning. A barmaid had been married from the "Bell" to an officer. He might be designated a T.G. (temporary gentleman), but he was the son of a well-to-do solicitor in Westhampton. The war, it was said, scrapped class distinctions. Tom didn't believe this. But there had been a levelling.

Absurd trifles warp grave decisions. Left alone, never lacking determination and courage, it is certain that Tom would have told Missy the truth. It is quite as certain that she would have accepted it valiantly, probably with an outpouring of sympathy for her father which would have astonished and delighted that much tried little man.

Because she beamed at Roddy and because he beamed back at her, Tom did a foolish thing, and did it still more foolishly without serious reflection. He wrote a letter to Miss Emily Green.

"Will you swear to leave Puddenhurst if I stump up? Will you go away and stay away? I've given you already more than you deserve, and you know it. This is the very last time. Prompt answer will oblige."

This billet reached Em'ly by the first post next morning. She replied promptly, as requested.

"Yes, I swear I will."

Tom sent her ten crisp ten pound notes.

VI

Em'ly grinned maliciously at earning such easy money. Revenge, however, to such women is even sweeter than cash. She hated Tom with increasing animosity, because he had treated her generously. She had been a fool to leave him; and she made that rankling discovery too late. Had he followed her and the bagman, she might have flung herself at his feet and sobbed for forgiveness. She knew somehow that Tom was glad to be rid of her.

Again and again, since then, she had wheedled money out of him by specious lying, hoping, possibly, with the optimism that follows indulgence in strong waters, that he might—if she worked hard enough upon his pity—take her back.

Meeting him face to face she realized that he loathed her.

She re-read his letter. There was no mention in it of "the kid." Em'ly snarled to herself:

"I can get at him through the kid."

No compunction stirred within her. The sight of Missy on Darling had aroused no emotion other than acute jealousy. Most men go to the devil stumblingly. Their path is upward, in a sense; they pause to look back. But a woman of Emily Kinsman's character and temperament races down the slopes and plunges over the abyss. Such women are irreclaimable.

From her bedroom window, Em'ly could see The Yard. Bert and the strappers dropped in after six to drink a tankard of ale. It was, therefore, easy for a buxom, still comely barmaid to find out when and where she would be likely to find Miss Kinsman alone.

On Thursday morning, a non-hunting day, Em'ly sewed ten notes into her stays and presented the exasperated Mrs. Chaundy with a week's notice. She had learned from Bert that Thursday afternoon was Missy's time to make out bills, pay them, and answer letters. On Thursday afternoon Tom Kinsman went to West-hampton. Em'ly saw him depart in his Ford car. From two to six Miss Green was at liberty to walk abroad.

She put on her best and flashiest clothes. With the light behind her, Em'ly might have appeared to a short-sighted person as not much more than thirty. She had married Tom Kinsman when she was seventeen.

She peacocked across the yard and tapped at the office door.

"Come in," said Missy.

Em'ly entered, not quite at her ease. Missy, seated at her father's desk, beheld a cony seal coat, a stole that looked as if it had been stolen from a white cat, a large waggling hat of the Gainsborough pattern, and a face between hat and stole that challenged attention.

"You have come to see me?" asked Missy.

"Yes."

"What about?"

"Personal matter," said Em'ly. "May I take a chair?"

She took it without permission, staring brazenly at her daughter. Before leaving Mrs. Chaundy's bar, the barmaid had helped herself to four fingers of gin. The fragrance of juniper was borne to Missy's sensitive nostrils.

"Who are you?"

"Tell you presently. Are we alone?" Missy nodded. "And not likely to be disturbed?" Missy nodded again, attempting to determine whether her extraordinary visitor was "dotty" or "muzzy."

"I knew your father before you were born."

"Yes?"

Monosyllables disconcert mischief makers. Em'ly was telling herself that she ought to have had "another." Missy's chill, aloof politeness upset her.

"He hasn't changed much."

"We don't change much," replied Missy calmly. "We remain what we *are*. Did you come here to talk business or to tell me about my father?"

"Both," snapped Em'ly. "Also, I knew your mother."

Missy winced. In her eyes might have been seen a steely light, not inherited from Em'ly. Just such a light shone in Tom's eyes when he was putting a doubtful horse at an obstacle. Missy had made up her mind that her visitor was a "person." It was intolerable that a "person" should mention her angel mother. The word "sacrilege" occurred to her as indicating the heinousness of the offence.

"*You* knew my mother?"

To save her life Missy couldn't help laying emphasis on the "you." Em'ly flushed through her powder. Above the soiled white stole her face assumed the appearance of a full-blown peony.

"Intimately," she rapped out.

Missy sat upright in her chair. Nervously, she pushed aside some bills, realizing that "trouble," as it is understood in the hunting field, lay ahead of her. Em'ly continued defiantly:

"She wasn't a bad sort, if you took her right. You know what I mean."

"No; I don't. I can hardly remember my mother. She died when I was four years old."

Em'ly gasped. And the flush on her face deepened as the full implication involved in this astounding statement revealed itself. *Her husband had regarded her as dead.* He had dared to tell "her" child that she was dead. If she had known that she would have asked for five hundred pounds or a pension. Tom, being Tom, the doting father of a stuck-up minx, would have paid up. Futile fury possessed and ravaged her. She ought to have guessed that such a man, a professional haggler, would never have paid the exact sum demanded, unless he was making a bargain.

"Died when you were four years old," repeated Em'ly. "I was born in the same village as your mother."

This, by the mere luck of phrasemaking, was Em'ly's happiest effort. Missy's face softened. Too hastily she made sure that this dreadful person was a suppliant. Probably she wanted a little money. Looking beneath a meretricious surface, it was possible to reconstruct Em'ly. Subtract twenty years of wear and tear from her, and one beheld dimly a pretty village girl in her teens, the playmate of an angel mother. As such she did have a claim upon the Kinsmans.

"You were born at Saffron Orcas?"

"Yes—ever been there?"

"Not since I was a baby."

"Your mother lost her parents not long after she married, but her brother, your uncle, took over the little farm. You don't visit him?"

"No."

"Funny, isn't it?"

Missy's face hardened again.

"Not at all. Father left Melchester after mother's death and came here. He has worked very hard, no time for holidays. He—he has never talked to me about my mother's relations."

"He—wouldn't."

Em'ly spoke scornfully, tossing her head. Missy said stiffly :

" I'm very busy this afternoon. May I ask you to tell me why you have come to me ? "

" Yes, you may. I've dropped in, unexpected-like, to tell you that your precious father is a liar.

Missy jumped up.

" Leave this room at once."

Em'ly rose.

" I'm going to leave this room, my sweet child, and you can tell your father that I'm going to leave Puddenhurst, because I'm a woman as keeps her solemn word. He paid me one hundred pounds to skin out, his words. I have it here." She tapped a too ample bosom. " I am skinning out, but before I go I mean to skin some pride out of you. I can hurt him through you. That's that. He slipped up, tell him, on one bit o' peel. He ought to have made me swear to leave Puddenhurst without telling you that I'm your—*mother !* "

In horrified silence, Missy stared at her.

CHAPTER VIII

MISSY DISSEMBLES

I

EM'LY vanished long before Missy recovered powers of speech. And, as the door closed behind the mother, the daughter heard a laugh.

The laugh established identity. The hard, derisive sound echoed in Missy's memory. The mists of years lifted. She had dreaded, as a child, that mocking laughter. And now, she could see a face blurred by time. Merely a glimpse, but it sufficed. Very rarely, never of late, that pretty face came back to the girl in troubled dreams. Once she had asked Tom: "Why don't I dream nice dreams of my mummy?" And he answered crossly: "Ask another, poppet." Missy stood still, stunned by the shock of conviction.

This "person" *was* her mother!

Mechanically, she returned to the desk, sat down, and fiddled with the unpaid bills. She was unaware that she had changed in a twinkling from a girl into a woman. A girl, naturally enough, thinks of and for herself; a woman thinks of others. Missy's thoughts concerned themselves with her father. They buzzed, like angry bees, about him. She guessed what he must have suffered at this person's hands. She could recall bickerings overhead through thin walls. With what pluck, he had rooted himself out of Melchester, building up his business, making new friends—elsewhere. And,

through it all, kind and considerate to the child of such a woman.

Had Tom entered the office at a moment when sensibilities were a-quiver with pity and sympathy she would have rushed at him, and kissed away his indignation and resentment. Woman's instinct for ministration would have been justified. Unhappily, Missy was not a child of impulse. She had been trained to ride by a fine horseman. He had inculcated the virtues of patience, self-restraint and good temper when dealing with horses. What Tom had learnt from horses he applied to men and women.

"Give him his head and keep your own," was a dictum.

The ultimate triumph of "head" was rubbed in like embrocation.

Missy, after the first ebullition of heart, used her head.

"I can hurt him through you."

"Can you?" thought Missy. With something of her father's grim humour, she reflected that Mrs. Kinsman, in her turn, had "slipped up" on another bit of peel. Dad couldn't be hurt, if his daughter held her tongue. Dad, so ran Missy's thoughts, did not "part" too easily. In Missy's eyes a hundred pounds was a big sum of money. He had paid heavily to secure silence. She trembled to think what he would do when he found out that he had been swindled. It was comforting, in this connection, to bear in mind Mrs. Kinsman's statement that she meant to "skin out." Fear of a justly enraged husband was certain to speed her on her way. Finally, Missy murmured to herself:

"Dad shan't be hurt through me. He mustn't know that I know."

II

Tom returned from Westhampton in fine fettle. He had bought a nice young horse, and—greater cause for rejoicing—had escaped being “landed” with a wrong ‘un. Dealers make more mistakes than is generally supposed. They are constrained to buy in any market, at any time and from anybody.

He chuckled and rubbed his hands, as he told Missy his latest story :

“ I went to look at a horse, below Bar, which came from the north. Big, upstanding brute, rarely muscled, carry fifteen stun over any country. Jim Syers had him. Of course we know our Jim, but I’ve bought good horses from Jim, and bad ‘uns, too. Jim never was a horse master. His stables make me sick. But this big ‘un was titivated up a treat. Hooves be—utifully blacked. I had him stripped, looked him over, and Jim gave him a run up and down his yard. I’d looked at the others. And not one had his shoes blacked. Jim says : ‘ You pick a fault in him if you can.’ I did my best, Missy, but the more I looked at him the better I liked him. A hunter all over. Jim says : ‘ He can jump anything, bold as a lion !’ I had to believe the biggest liar in Westhampton, when a strapper popped him over a stiff brush fence they have. ‘ Learnt that in Leicestershire,’ says Jim. And it looked like it, Missy. Well, to cut the cackle, we got to figures, and agreed on a price, one hundred and thirty pounds.”

“ Stiffish,” said Missy.

“ Not for a three hundred guinea horse. And Jim spoke the truth for once when he said : ‘ I can’t sell a horse like that, but you can, Tom.’ All the same, I told myself that there must be something wrong.”

“ And there was,” said Missy.

“ There was. I’ve never been so nearly had. But

those polished hooves set me to thinking. I wondered whether he'd been nerved for navicular, so I pricked him on the coronet when Jim's back was turned with a pin, and he nearly knocked me down. Then I looked over his feet again. And, by gosh! I found out the trouble. Half the horn of his off fore was gone, and they'd fitted him up with a new half foot made of gutta percha. That was why they'd been so mighty particular about black-leading his trilbies. Jim Syers is hot stuff, and don't you forget it."

"I shan't," said Missy.

"I'm so tickled with myself that I'm going to give you a new hat. What have we got for supper?"

"Steak and kidney pudding."

"Ah! Sticks to the ribs, that does. What sort of afternoon did you put in?"

"I got through the letters and bills all right."

"Any callers?"

Missy thought that she detected a faint note of anxiety in his voice. She lied splendidly:

"Nobody, Dad, of any importance."

Tom pinched her firm little chin and kissed her.

"Nice, clever little bit of stuff you are. If the new hat runs to thirty bob, there'll be no complaints."

"You're the best daddy in the world."

The feeling in her voice, made him lift his eyebrows, because Missy, as a rule, was not demonstrative. He murmured, after a pause:

"Take after me, you do."

"I hope so," Missy replied.

She slipped in to the house, leaving Tom to make his customary round, a duty he never missed, however tired he might be. You may be sure that Bert had the story of the big 'un, with even more corroborative detail. Later on, Mrs. Chaundy heard it, too. Mary, however listened with less than her usual interest in a

misdeal. When Tom finished, she muttered querulously :

" I'm a bit put out, Tom."

" Nobody's had you, have they ? "

" Did you happen to notice a fresh-coloured stranger behind my bar, when you passed through two days ago ? "

" N-n-no," said Tom.

" You'd have noticed her, may be, if she was younger and better looking. Came up from Devon. I paid her fare. She gave me a week's notice this morning. A baggage ! "

" Must be," assented Tom. " Take the taste of her out of your mouth with a full dose of the 1908 ; and I'll down my share of the medicine."

" You didn't notice her ? " persisted Mrs. Chaundy.

" Why should I ? "

" Because she seemed to be interested in you."

The surprise on Tom's face would have been a credit to Sacha Guitry.

" Interested in me ? "

" Asked a lot of questions from me and others."

" They have heard of me in Devon," said Tom, facetiously. " Likely as not she had designs on me."

Mary smiled at her friend.

" And when she saw you, she hadn't."

Tom grinned at Mary.

" Unlikelier things have happened."

III

A man who cast yesterdays as rubbish to the void despatched from his mind Miss Emily Green, but he had to cook accounts to which Missy had access in order to prevent her asking questions about a hundred pounds.

Next day, buck hounds met at Brockenford Weirs. Roddy was riding Rescue, but when he asked Missy to pilot him through the Forest, she made an excuse

which to Roddy appeared flimsy. "The Bart." however, offered to drive Roddy in his car to the meet and, accordingly, Rescue was sent on with the other Kinsman horses.

Tom was on his new purchase, bought with the definite purpose of selling it to the young gentleman staying at the "Haunch of Venison," who Tom designated as "Captain Shellshock." He wasn't a captain and he was not suffering from shell-shock, but his nerves were out of order, and he had admitted this to the dealer. Tom had little compassion on the "know-it-alls." If they chose to pit their knowledge of a horse against his knowledge (and vast experience), let them do so at their risk. Now and again a customer did pick a clinker on his own judgment. Tom was fond of telling a certain story against himself—with a corollary attached. A carpet-bagger had walked into The Yard and into the office, where he stated what sort of horse he was seeking with a brevity and decision that much pleased the little man. Perfect horses are as rare as perfect men. It is doubtful whether there are five-and-twenty in the kingdom. Always there is—*something*: a blemish, a vice, a weakness. Magnificent performers, "top-notchers," are frequently uncomfortable impatient brutes when nothing is doing. On the other hand, the animal with perfect manners at the meet and amongst a crowd of eager followers may lack the *vim* to crash through a big hairy fence and land well over the far ditch into the next field. Superb fencers are often slow between fences; galloping blood 'uns ask for trouble. Who would have it otherwise? The uncertainties of the chase, the triumphs and disasters, make it the sport of kings and costermongers.

Dealers like Tom Kinsman never have more than one or two good horses in stables that may hold forty. Accordingly, Tom showed his best to the carpet-bagger without any waste of time. To Tom's astonishment

and disgust, his customer "turned down" the pick of the stable, and "fancied" a thin, raking black mare which the dealer had bought cheap somewhere in Dorset. The carpet-bagger made up his mind about the black in five minutes. He bought her, without haggling, for sixty-five pounds. It happened to be the end of the season and prices were reasonably low. The mare was turned out by her owner into some water-meadows. When cubbing began Tom failed to recognize her. The carpet-bagger sold her before Christmas for two hundred guineas! Now for the corollary. Tom added that to the story:

"I'm blowed if every noodle in the Forest didn't think that he could pick plums out of my basket. Never had such a lot of mugs in The Yard before or since. I told Missy it would pay me to let a clinker go for a song just once a year. For why? 'Cos I'd make big money during the dance that followed. See?"

The horse intended for "Captain Shellshock" had been bought cheap under conditions not familiar to "outsiders." Tom attended fairs. Horse-coping at fairs has its humours. Farmers sell young horses at fairs when they have failed to dispose of them in the hunting field. Only the elect can discern beneath a rough coat the quality that may be there. Lack of muscle again may be due to inferior food, rank hay and cheap oats. The time comes when the farmer has to sell and sell quick. So he takes his nag to a fair. In that open market, he is the natural prey of some gang of copers who thrive on what is termed "crabbing." Would-be purchasers of a horse at a fair have to take their turn to "look over" him. The gang, when they find a likely horse—and there are no better judges of horseflesh in the world—elbow aside bona-fide buyers, and begin to "crab" the nag. One after another, each rascal points out to the astounded owner blemishes and weaknesses that have escaped his observation for the

good reason that they are imaginary. This takes time, and the bona fide buyers are not encouraged by what they overhear. By the end of the day, the farmer is disheartened and accepts, desperately, what is offered by the last of the gang. Or, he rides his horse home, sends for a dealer, and takes that dealer's money because nothing else is possible. Tom Kinsman had earned a reputation amongst farmers of being "square and fair."

He found "Captain Shellshock" at the meet, afoot, but wearing the "'ossiest" of breeches and leggings. A deal was made subject to the object of it passing Mr. Sebastian Eddols, the vet. The young gentleman had a "go" on the animal and expressed himself as satisfied. Tom explained the low price (he had demanded double what he gave) by enlightening his customer about fairs.

"Ought to be called 'unfairs,'" he remarked genially.

"I quite agree," said "Captain Shellshock." "I may attend some of these 'unfairs' myself."

"You wouldn't have a look in," said Tom earnestly, sensible that a voluble tongue had outrun discretion. "They'd skin you alive. Ever heard of the 'clinch penny' game?"

"N-n-no."

"Two rogues work it. First rogue spots a useful nag, buys him, and clinches the bargain by stumping up ten bob. He tells the seller to take the horse out of the fair to a stable. He promises to weigh in with the balance of cash when the fair is over. He doesn't weigh in. See?"

"Then he forfeits ten bob, Mr. Kinsman."

"I don't think. Rogue number two weighs in about the time when the seller is fed up with waiting. He hears the tale, and drops a tear of sympathy. *Too bad!* He's so kind and thoughtful that he makes an offer for the quad, shaving a slice off the other rogue's

bid. If the farmer don't bite, first rogue turns up and takes away a horse that was got cheap early in the morning."

"Captain Shellshock," pot-valiant after "two" before he left the "Haunch of Venison," was not convinced.

"But there must be opportunities at such places if a fellow knows a bit."

"It has to be a good bit," said Tom. "My advice to gentlemen, like yourself, is this: never changed the tune in twenty years. *Buy from me!* It don't pay me to let customers down. This horse now—if you don't fancy him on better acquaintance, I'll take him back. Time and time again I've offered customers a profit on a deal with me."

The young man was impressed. He nodded solemnly. Tom's paternal instincts provoked him to add a few more warning words:

"You keep out of fairs, sir. Could you spot a horse that suffered from vertigo, which only shows itself periodically, or a 'quidder' with imperfect teeth, fattened up on soft food?"

"I suppose I couldn't, Mr. Kinsman."

"Would you know a 'shiverer'?"

"A 'shiverer'?"

"Comes from an injured spine. What price a 'crib-biter' or a 'wind-sucker'?"

"Captain Shellshock" laughed.

"I have an awful lot to learn," he murmured.

"Of course you have. Same here."

He laughed and moved away.

IV

Hounds drew Redridge, where the harbourer had seen a notable buck that morning feeding by himself. The tufters howled when they were coupled up and left behind.

"The Bart." rode with Di Pundle, making the running after a fashion better suited to the Shires than the Forest of Ys. Roddy couldn't escape the doleful conviction that the owner of Brambleby Hall had achieved a start and intended to keep his place in the hunt. Harry Slufter was of the same opinion. The good fellow meant well, when he said to his friend :

"Monty is cuttin' you down, old bean."

"It looks like it, Harry."

"Cheerio ! As your pal, I want to stand by and do what I can. You ought to have been down here after Christmas."

Roddy replied viciously :

"I was a fool to come at all."

"There are others," said Harry.

"I suppose so," admitted Roddy.

"You'll get over this pash, believe me. And all said and done can you give Di what she wants ? "

Roddy scowled at him.

"Very little has been said, and nothing has been done."

The Captain made another effort :

"Monty will drop Di, the moment hounds find."

"Yes ; I suppose a fellow like that doesn't even rate a charming girl 'something better than his dog, something dearer than his horse.' "

"Not a bad chap, Monty," said the Captain, as he cantered on.

Soon the common sense of the Selwins asserted supremacy over a fit of the dolefuls. The Selwins faced facts. Self analysis revealed to Roddy that Missy, not Di, had clouded a delightful spring morning. Her manner in The Yard had puzzled him. There was no taint of the provincial coquette about her. He had come to regard her as a pal ; he flattered himself that she regarded him as a sincere friend. And yet—she had met him that morning with cool—was it studied ?

—indifference. At breakfast—Roddy, of course did not know this—Tom Kinsman had stared hard at his daughter, as she poured out his tea, startling her with an abrupt question: "You haven't been crying, Missy?" Bearing in mind the paternal injunction to tell the truth when it didn't hurt the feelings of others, Missy replied indignantly: "Crying? Whatever for? My eyes are a bit inflamed—touch of east in the wind." Tom said quickly: "My mistake," and attacked his eggs and bacon.

A prolonged toot from the master's horn proclaimed that hounds had found. Unfortunately, introspection had made a laggard of Roddy. Rescue mildly resented this, cocking his ears and boring on the bit. Roddy let the old horse have his head and was pushing his way through the women and the kids on ponies, when he heard Missy's clear voice just behind him:

"This way, Mr. Selwin."

Roddy followed her down a path, dodging branching of trees, and through a gate which she opened and held open till the novice had passed through. Hounds were in front of them, running fast over heavy heather.

"Thanks," said Roddy.

He had good reason to be grateful. Missy had nicked in cleverly. Undivided attention had to be given to Rescue, who was so surprised and gratified to find himself at the top of a hunt, that he forgot the pleasures of the manger for a few glorious minutes. Nevertheless it flashed into Roddy's mind that Missy invariably did turn up when he was in difficulties; and, as a sailor, he had a high opinion of anybody who could save a situation.

"The Bart." was to the right of hounds, and perilously near them. Possibly, as a friend of the master's he dared to take liberties. His big horse appeared to be cantering along, whereas Rescue was fully extended. Di Pundle was not in sight.

Hounds checked for a minute after leaving the heather and were left alone. Roddy hoped that the Field would not come up. He could see the Major and Harry Slufter. The Major nodded to him, which was pleasant. A second afterwards the big dog pack raced into Winefield's enclosure.

Roddy followed Missy. It was a liberal education for a novice to see her flitting through the trees, picking her way through hollies and scrub oak without fear or hesitation mounted on a mare not Forest-wise.

Hounds raced on and on with a breast high scent.

"Toot—toot—toot!" twanged the horn.

If the field failed to hear those joyous notes, they would be left behind. And, at this moment, it occurred to Roddy that Missy was riding Darling, not yet in condition, harder than might be deemed prudent.

They crossed the Cronmouth road, rattling over the tar-mac, slipped across Binney Ridge, and into the pine woods beyond. Roddy, it is to be feared, paid no attention to hounds. He had made up his mind to follow Missy or perish. For the first time, the unmistakable frenzy of hunting, obsessed him. He was galloping down a ride on velvety turf, now in the saddle and now out of it. Nobody could criticize his performance, because he was the last of the first-flighters.

At the end of the ride was a locked gate, not to be taken off its hinges. Monty alone "had" it, and vanished. The others fetched a compass. If Di had seen the enchanting parabola described by horse and man——!

The master led the way, found another gate not locked, and blew his horn. Hounds, swinging left handed, were crossing some low-lying meadows.

"Hold hard!"

Hounds swung towards them, almost into them, and away again towards the higher ground, on and on,

faster than ever. There are skirters who say that a good horse is wasted in the Forest in the Ys. They do not see the end or even the middle of such a hunt as this.

"The Bart." was in his place, with his hat jammed hard upon the back of his head.

"Ware wire, you damned fool!"

"The Bart." heard nothing. There was a fence at the end of the water-meadows, with a big ditch on the far side. Three strands of barb-wire and a stout bar on top. The Foresters galloped for a distant gate, and Rescue plugged on doggedly behind them. But Missy—to Roddy's consternation—followed "the Bart." He knew what his horse could do, but did she have equal faith in Darling?

"The Bart." went at the obstacle fast, and cleared every thing magnificently. Roddy turned sick as he watched Missy. Was the girl mad?

No. She steadied Darling, picked the lowest place, and landed well into the next field.

Old John was beside Roddy as they passed through the gate.

"Who is that girl?" he asked.

"A friend of mine," Roddy replied. "Tom Kinsman's daughter."

"Yes, yes; wish she were mine."

They galloped on.

V

In Purley Outer Rails hounds ran into fresh deer. The master was called upon to exercise his craft. The younger hounds carried on with a cry that sent the whippers-in galloping to their heads. The three and four season veterans hung back—mute, heads up, looking to their huntsmen for guidance. He did not fail them. The hunted buck had passed a pond in the meadows, with no time to "soil." He was making for other water, turning right handed. Roddy

approached Missy, now off her horse, eyeing Darling critically. Her eyes were sparkling; her cheeks were flushed.

"You're a wonder," said Roddy.

The admiration in voice and glance brought a smile to her lips.

"It was nothing. I knew the mare could do it. I've had her through our school. I—I wanted—and she wanted—that locked gate, but——"

"But—what?"

"It would have looked too like swank. Hark!"

A whimper from Cottager, and then the full chorus. The master's forward and right-handed cast was triumphantly justified. Missy jumped into the saddle without putting her foot into the stirrup.

"Nothing like blood," she said to Roddy. "The mare is none the worse for that burst. And it was a burst."

The master, half a minute before, had pointed his whip at Cottager, saying to old John:

"Belvoir hound, sired by Comus."

Old John nodded with Olympian majesty.

Hounds worked slowly through Birchley and up to Oldrewood. By this special grace, Rescue was able to live with them. By this grace, also, some of the field, keen trailers, followers of fresh tracks, overtook hounds. Tom Kinsman was not amongst them. Having sold his horse, he took it home and 'phoned for Mr. Eddols.

As soon as the deep woods were passed, the pace quickened till hounds threw up at the water in Ruckpits. Here, five precious minutes were wasted, and more stragglers rode up, full of excuses for having been left behind at the start.

"Don't know how I missed 'em," said a belated arrival to "the Bart." "I never heard the horn at all."

"Stick to hounds, and it won't happen next time," replied Sir Montagu curtly, glancing at this watch.

The master was casting hounds down stream, when a halloa from a woodman told him that the buck had been viewed leaving the water higher up. As he passed the woodman, he received the information so vital to a huntsman and so rarely to be relied upon.

"He be beaten, sinkin' fast."

"How d'ye know?"

"Jaw out, sir; back bent."

"Thank you."

A half-crown was tossed to him, as the master pressed on to the spot where the buck had left the stream. Hounds hit the line instantly, although the scent of a sinking buck is likely to fail. Followers stuck to a ride, always excepting the reckless "Bart." Missy followed him. Roddy followed Missy. "The Bart.," by this time, was aware that Miss Kinsman, alone of the field, had jumped the wire fence out of the water meadows. Out of the corner of his eye, he looked hard at Darling.

"Must be a fizzer," he muttered to himself, as Missy and he, close together, leapt a deep ditch with rotten banks. Roddy wondered whether Rescue would have it. The old horse was slowing up. But he cocked his ears and reached at his bridle.

Bif—f—f!

The rotten ground yielded just under the hocks as Rescue took off. The deep ditch engulfed the steed; the rider pitched well on his head upon the far bank. The undaunted Rescue, planting both fore feet on the bank, emerged slowly. Roddy mounted him.

"This is glorious fun," he reflected.

There were no more ditches, and, at the moment, he was nearer hounds than the master.

Up the steep hill climbed panting horses. The more

cunning amongst the followers steered straight for Ockley pond, where the gallant buck stood at bay.

Missy had the honour of holding the master's horse, as he waded waist-deep into the pond to administer the *coup de grâce*.

A six mile point. Time : fifty-five minutes.

When the Master came back to Missy, he lifted his cap.

"I should like you to have the head," he said.

It was a great moment for Tom Kinsman's daughter.

"I shall have it mounted and sent to you."

"You are very kind, sir," stammered Missy.

She hesitated, looking at his jolly face.

"Might I ask for a slot, Master? Mr. Selwin, riding our old Rescue, was with hounds from the find. And this is his first good hunt."

"Of course, my dear; glad you told me. First good hunt, what? We ought to blood him, b' Jove!"

"He was blooded at Zeebrugge."

"Ah! I heard of that. He shall have his slot anyway for what he did there."

As he rode off, "the Bart." rode up, solemn as an owl.

"Is that mare for sale, Miss Kinsman?"

"Yes, Sir Montagu, but she's not in condition and— and she's not everybody's ride."

"Young, I take it, and sound."

"She is."

"That's good enough for me. What's the bedrock figure?"

Tom Kinsman's daughter replied without hesitation:

"A hundred and forty guineas."

"Right! She's mine if she passes the vet."

"I'll tell father," said Missy.

CHAPTER IX

A BOMB DROPS IN PUDDENHURST

I

TOM was in The Yard, when Missy and Roddy returned from this memorable hunt. Mr. Sebastian Eddols had come and gone, passing as sound the horse bought by "Captain Shellshock." Tom was in the best of tempers, but slightly astonished to see Roddy so early in the afternoon. Young men paying three guineas for hirelings (not to mention the "cap") generally remained with hounds till they went back to kennels. His alert mind put two and two together and made five of them. Missy, of course, riding a horse not in prime condition, would think half a day quite enough. Obviously, the Commander was ready to sacrifice that amount of valuable time for the mere pleasure of her company. As a matter of fact, Roddy, not Rescue, had had enough of a good thing. He was stiff and sore, particularly about the muscles of neck and shoulder, and his thoughts dwelt pleasurably upon a hot bath.

Tied to his saddle was the SLOT!

Strappers led the horses to their boxes, and Missy was called upon to describe the run, which she did, so Roddy thought, admirably, doing justice to everybody concerned except herself. Roddy supplied the *lacunæ* in the young lady's text.

"She went like a bird, Mr. Kinsman. I should have been lag of the field, as usual, if it hadn't been for her. She and Sir Montagu jumped a whacking fence out of

the meadows, three strands of wire and a rail on top."

"What?" exclaimed Tom, incredulously. He knew the fence in question.

Missy frowned. Why hadn't she pledged this excitable young man to secrecy?

"Flew the lot, ditch and all."

Tom stuck out his jaw.

"You took a risk like that," he growled. "On a valuable horse?"

Roddy felt unhappy. He had not considered the "lep" from a business point of view. Tom continued testily:

"You might have broken the mare's neck."

"Or her own," added Roddy.

"Her neck is her own property, Commander, but the mare belongs to me. Never did such a silly thing as that in all my life, never!"

"Oh, dad."

"Never," said Mr. Kinsman, "unless I wanted to sell a horse."

"I had that in mind," said Missy coolly. "Sir Montagu has looked at Darling more than once lately. He can ride her. He has beautiful hands. He can ride anything. He has bought Darling, if she passes Mr. Eddols."

"Well, I'm damned," exclaimed Tom. "This puts the lid on it. You are my own girl, every bit of you. Bought her! But I never mentioned a price to you."

"You told me you gave forty-three. I thought under the circumstances that you'd be glad to get your money back."

Tom scowled.

"Ho! You had the impudence to think that I'd let you risk your neck for forty-three quid?"

"Perhaps I put my neck at a bigger figure, dad. Sir Montagu didn't haggle. He is paying one hundred and forty guineas for Darling. And she's worth it."

Tom grinned. Paternity was now established upon a basis never to be shaken.

"You're beyond my giddy horizon, Missy. But, tell me, child, whatever made you ask one hundred and forty? I'd have taken much less gladly."

Again Missy feared that her father's feelings might be lacerated if she told the truth. She had asked one hundred and forty guineas, because that sum covered with a pound or two to spare what Mr. Kinsman had paid for the mare, *plus* the blackmail extorted by Mrs. Kinsman. She smiled faintly, as she murmured:

"I—I thought he would pay that, dad."

Tom nodded, quite satisfied with the answer. He said genially:

"We must wet this. Will you step into the house, Commander? There's a fairish ham in cut, a Stilton cheese and some port you may like."

"With the greatest pleasure," said Roddy.

II

Mr. Eddols passed Darling as sound. A week afterwards, Sir Montagu told old John, who repeated the remark to Tom Kinsman, that he wouldn't accept fifty guineas profit on his bargain.

It could not be affirmed that Roddy outstayed his welcome, but he lingered longer in Tom's dining-room than was necessary. Missy challenged his interest strongly as he compared her with other young women of his acquaintance. Her air of slight aloofness still puzzled him. She appeared to disdain the guiles of her sex. Novice though he was, unversed in the ways of women and horses, he decided that Missy had ridden Darling recklessly. Why? Not surely for the sole purpose of selling a horse to a customer. And "the Bart.," being nearest to hounds during the hunt, had been the only follower who had not seen her "go."

Tom hurried back to his beloved yard, leaving the

young people alone with the ham and the cheese. Roddy told Missy what old John had said about her. She blushed with pleasure.

"I've never had so nice a compliment as that."

"He meant it, Miss Kinsman. How would you like to be his daughter?"

"I wouldn't exchange my father for all the fathers in the world."

He noticed that she spoke vehemently. To his surprise she began to sing Tom's praises.

"Nobody knows dad except me, Mr. Selwin. He pinched dreadfully to send me to a good school. Dealers have such hard times. With us it's always a feast or a famine."

"Feast is on now," remarked Roddy. "Two good sales in one day."

"Yes; things are much brighter. But imagine a stable full of horses eating their heads off, and hounds not hunting on account of drought, or rabies, or foot-and-mouth disease. Dad has had to fight hard to keep his head above water, but when he was up to his neck in troubles, he was never cross with me, unless I deserved it."

"You run this house, Miss Kinsman?"

"I do my best."

"You help in the office?"

"Of course."

"And you exercise horses. Your work is cut out for you. I wonder what your father would do without you."

She answered sharply:

"He won't have to do without me. I shall stick to dad, rain or shine."

Again her vehemence whetted his curiosity.

"But one day, if the right fellow comes along, you'll marry."

"No."

Roddy laughed.

"I suppose thousands, millions of daughters have said that."

"Perhaps they have."

Piqued by her tone, still curious, but not unmoved, Roddy said in a lower tone:

"Your father would be wretched, if—if he thought you intended to sacrifice for him the things which to most women make life worth living."

"He mustn't think I'm going to do anything of the sort. I—I have spoken too frankly to you, Mr. Selwin. I—I am sorry."

"I'm not," said Roddy earnestly. "It was friendly of you, a sort of tribute which I value. Talk is such a frothy, bubbly thing unless one gets under the surface. Why shouldn't we talk together as pals?"

Missy had half a dozen reasons, but she remained silent, crumbling her bread with nervous fingers.

"I want to be your friend. I feel that I am your friend, because—well, because you have befriended me, and also, which is perhaps a better reason——"

He broke off.

"Yes?"

"You can inspire friendship, Miss Kinsman, the genuine article. It's amazing."

"Why?"

Roddy hesitated. If he, in his turn, told the truth he might hurt her feelings. But surely it was amazing that the daughter of a horse dealer, associating daily with strappers and the mixed company that came to The Yard, should be able to inspire any emotion other than pity. Terrified lest a young woman so acute might read his thoughts, he evaded a direct answer.

"You have an astonishing father, but you must have been lucky in your choice of a mother."

"My mother?"

"Yes; won't you tell me something about her?"

"I lost my mother when I was four years old."

She spoke with finality. Roddy apologized.

"I beg your pardon. I didn't know that. Can you remember her?"

"Yes."

She stood up.

"You ought to be getting into that hot bath, Mr. Selwin. Add a small handful of washing soda. It will take the stiffness out of your neck and shoulders."

"Thanks; I will."

He perceived that he was being kindly and discreetly dismissed.

III

After his bath, at ease in an armchair, Roddy read a letter from his father which had come by the second post. The last half of it must be recorded:

.... Take care of yourself. I feel that Gannaway wouldn't break his heart if you broke your neck. Both he and Bandycutt hope that you won't hurry back. After their very forcible objections this amuses me. You are now an asset to the firm. Your screw will advance automatically till you become a partner. And so, if you are considering any important step which might mean worrying over ways and means, let me say this, with no wish to force confidence till you are ready to give it: if you marry the right sort of girl I am prepared to make things easy.—Your affectionate father,

GEORGE SELWIN.

Roddy re-read the letter and put it away. He was immensely pleased with it. At Gib., at Malta, at Southsea, a young and inflammable naval officer had met maidens who were suddenly exalted and enthroned as the best beloved. As suddenly, they fell from the pinnacle. Invariably, Selwin common sense tore

ephemeral passion to tatters, before harm was done to the protagonists. Possibly, in the senior service, it is part of the unwritten regulations that lieutenants may flirt *à discretion* although marriage is discouraged.

"Am I sure now?" thought Roddy. "Am I sure enough of myself to tell the dear old pater just how I stand?"

Where did he stand?

Di smiled upon him. But she smiled upon "the Bart." and the Captain. She could dance, play a useful game of tennis and had a good seat on a horse. Of her other accomplishments—if she had any—he knew nothing. It was startling to reflect that Missy, before, during and after this never-to-be-forgotten run, had monopolized his mind. His mind, not his heart.

After his dismissal, as he was leaving the dining-room, she had given him her list of "Don'ts," saying half apologetically: "I only jotted them down to make dad laugh."

(1) *Riding to the Meet*: Don't fail to gallop your nag. You get there quicker and take the stiffness out of a hireling.

(2) *At the Meet*: Don't hesitate to ride well up to the pack. This attracts notice. If possible, ride a kicker. If you sit him, everybody will commend your horsemanship. Always take buns, or better still, cheese, so as to establish friendly relations between yourself and hounds. Love me, love my dog, is the favourite motto of all Masters. Don't be shy about asking the master what cover he means to draw first. If you are nippy you may get there before him. Don't lift your hat as you approach him. This is a democratic age, and old-fashioned courtesy is now called snobbishness.

(3) *Throwing off*: Don't hang back. Push through the crowd. Don't forget that the nearer you are to

tail hounds the better. If a hound drops behind crack your whip at him.

(4) *Finding*: Don't forget to holloa a fox or buck if you see him. A huntsman needs all the information he can get. If the fox slips back and is chopped in cover that is his fault not yours. Don't be silly enough to wait till hounds are out of cover. You may lose your place in the hunt and never recover it.

(5) *During the Hunt*: Don't be too polite at gates. If a fool dismounts to open it, you can thank him as you gallop through. He has got off his horse; let him get on to it again—if he can. That is not your business. Never go first over a boggy place or at stiff timber. Jumping through gaps made by others saves your horse.

(6) *During a check*: Don't get off your horse if he is tired; he may lie down. Don't be shy of telling the huntsman where you think the fox has gone. Raise your voice so that he can hear you. Hounds feeling for a scent will raise their heads and pay marked attention to your suggestions. They are intelligent animals. It is prudent to move about when hounds are casting. If you stand still, either you or your horse may catch cold. This is the moment for a seasonable anecdote.

(7) *After the hunt*: Don't jog slowly home, if you are riding a horse that doesn't belong to you. Owner takes all risks. The sooner you are in your bath the better. Don't potter about the stable, looking for thorns and cuts. A groom is paid to do this.

N.B.—More “don'ts” on application.

A novice assimilated these “don'ts” with some amusement, thinking that irony was a dangerous weapon in the hands of a young woman. Missy apparently, had a sense of humour.

“She's as sharp as they make 'em,” he muttered.

IV

Dinner with "the Bart." followed. Old John dined alone at a small table in solitary splendour. It was said of him that he never exceeded his modest allowance of wine, a half pint of port after dinner, and one weak whisky and water with it. With his coffee he smoked a good cigar, and turned in at ten to the minute.

"The old boy," said "the Bart." to Roddy, "goes as well as ever, but he funks it a bit down here. Don't blame him! What will I drink?" He turned to the head waiter. "The best and driest fizz you have and plenty of it."

"Certainly, Sir Montagu. And a decanter of the 1904, Sandeman, with the dessert?"

"Please."

Roddy wondered whether "the Bart." had proposed marriage to Miss Diana Pundle and been accepted.

"Is this a celebration?" he asked.

"It is," replied "the Bart." seriously. "I bought what I believe to be a fizzer to-day. That calls for fizz. Because if the beast *is* a fizzer, it's sound to drink his health in the best; if he *isn't* you've had a good bottle, anyway. Well, we had a 'niceish' hunt, nothing to write home about, but good enough, eh?"

"Quite good enough for me."

"You weren't too well mounted. I didn't see you when hounds found, and five minutes later there you were. Very creditable."

"Give the credit to Miss Kinsman. I followed her."

"That girl is a fizzer, too—wasted down here, absolutely—wasted. She could show 'em the way anywhere. I had my eye on her to-day."

"Is your eye at the back of your head?"

"The Bart." laughed.

"It is if a good horse or a pretty girl is behind me. And that reminds me, I didn't see Di Pundle."

"Nor I."

"Extraordinary! She was with me when the buck was roused. I knew what galloping round the big enclosure meant, so I followed hounds and sung out to her to follow me. But she didn't. It—er—rattled me; it did indeed. To my notions these Foresters are too fond of stickin' to their ruddy-muddy rides. If you don't mind a ditch or two, you can cut across these woodlands. I have a very high opinion of Miss Di."

"As a horsewoman?"

"Really, between ourselves, I haven't seen her shove along yet. That's a pleasure to come. But, harkin' back to Tom Kinsman's girl, she's made a hit with old John."

"Yes. When she jumped that big fence he said to me that he wished she was his daughter."

"Wicked old man! A bachelor, as of course you know."

"Possibly a confirmed bachelor——" Roddy paused to frame a neat sentence, not to please "the Bart.," but himself. The patron of two livings said hastily:

"You can take it from me that old John was confirmed all right. Staunch churchman, what?"

"I'm sure of it. I was going to say that as a dyed-in-the-wool bachelor, with the full realization of the perils and uncertainties of married life, old John actually regretted that he had remained single, because if he had taken a dip into the lucky bag, he might have been awarded such a prize as Miss Kinsman."

"The Bart." applauded this.

"Word-slinger, you are. Ought to be in Parliament. Yes; old John talked about the girl ridin' home with me. Never knew her name till to-day, took her to be a pukka lady, what?"

"She is a pukka lady."

"Hay—? Tom Kinsman's daughter and the granddaughter of Joe Kinsman."

"I don't care a tinker's damlet about that," declared Roddy: "ladies be—blowed! Who isn't a lady now? Margery Kinsman is a gentlewoman—every inch of her."

"The Bart." stared at his guest and laughed.

"Sit tight, Selwin. I see she's a pal of yours, and, mark you, I don't dispute a word you say. Is this wine quite all right?"

"Slightly pricked," Roddy had to admit.

"Badly corked, you mean. Hi! You—old Pudding-face——!" He addressed the head waiter, who was surveying mournfully a party of Pussyfooters. "Get a move on! Fetch me another bottle—quick. And give this muck to that fat profiteer over there. He'll lap it up."

"Yessir," said the head waiter, respectfully. Later, he murmured to an understrapper: "Quite like old times waiting upon Sir Montagu Brambleby."

V

Fox hounds, next day, killed a ringing, pusillanimous fox after a pottering hunt, and did nothing more worth mentioning. Missy and her father were not out. One incident enlivened dull proceedings. At the meet, Roddy met the honorary secretary, the Nestor of the hunt, who had consented to "capping" reluctantly. Young fellows, of course, attended to that none too agreeable duty, whilst the honorary secretary dealt discreetly with possible subscribers. It might be less expensive, he pointed out, to pay the minimum subscription and thereby escape the tax of the cap. To some gentlemen and ladies (but not to Roddy) he mentioned the fact that the names of subscribers were printed and published. Such lists adorned mantel-pieces in country houses, and were scrutinized by people of importance. The honorary secretary had a soft spot in an otherwise indurated heart—indurated by visitors who promised to send a cheque and didn't

—for young officers of the army and navy. Roddy's modest but workmanlike appearance pleased him. In less than a minute they came to a satisfactory arrangement concerning a small grant in aid of diminishing funds. As the honorary secretary was moving on, a lady spoke to him, *acidulously*. Roddy could hear her aggrieved tones.

"I have subscribed handsomely to your hounds, Mr. Secretary."

Nestor replied cheerfully :

"You have, indeed, madam, and we are grateful, most grateful. We should like to see you out oftener."

The lady, no longer in the bloom of early youth, said tartly :

"The master never notices me, *never!*"

"He hunts hounds, madam. He is incapable of intentional discourtesy.

"Perhaps, all the same——"

"Yes?"

The lady snapped out the true grievance :

"I have seen several foxes broken up. Not once, not once, have I been offered even a pad."

The honorary secretary apologized, lifted his hat, and trotted towards the pack. He believed, wise man, in adjusting such not unimportant matters immediately. Roddy, much entertained, guessed what the secretary was whispering to the master a minute later. The master nodded, glancing out of the corner of a twinkling eye at the lady with the grievance, who happened to have her back to him.

Hounds, as has been said, killed a ringing fox, after a run described by "the Bart." as "Here we go round the mulberry bush." Tipperary preferred a ringing hunt with a slow, catchy scent. He carried Roddy round and round one of the biggest enclosures till our hero felt giddy. When hounds rolled over the varmint Tipperary was there. The Master, his wife, "the Bart."

and half a dozen men were gathered together in a small glade. When the first whip had performed the usual rites, the Master looked round. He may have thought that he was talking to himself, but his words came clearly to Roddy's ears:

"I wonder where that damned old nuisance is who wants the brush."

A lady appeared from behind a holly bush.

"I am here," she said, vindictively; "and I don't want the brush of such a miserable fox."

Homeric laughter rent the air.

Roddy returned to The Yard late that afternoon. Tom was absent; Missy was busy applying hot fomentations to the badly strained hock of a hireling. Bert said to Roddy:

"She's been at it for 'ours, sir, a-dippin' bits o' flannel into bilin' water, wringin' of 'em out, and a-clappin' of 'em hon."

Bert took Tipperary and led him to his box. Roddy crossed the yard with the intention of watching Miss Kinsman in a new part.

She had rolled up her sleeves and arrayed herself in a big white overall. When she beheld Roddy, she nodded indifferently.

"Do you want father, Mr. Selwin?" Without waiting for a reply, she continued in the same curt voice: "He went out riding. I don't know where he has gone or when he will come back."

This was not encouraging.

"You are busy?"

"Very."

Roddy took the hint, seeking the more congenial society of Bert, who displayed what was intended to be a smile. The nagsman was quick at the uptake, and he liked Roddy—not merely because he was free with his half-crowns. Bert held the considered opinion that the Commander had "got it" where the swan got the

diphtheria, and he had mentioned this, *en passant*, to the new barmaid at the "Bell."

Glancing at a disconcerted countenance, Bert said sympathetically:

"You know what we calls the guv'nor be'ind 'is back, sir?"

"I don't."

"'Ot fomentations."

"Hot fomentations?"

"That's right. 'Ot and 'ot, and plenty of 'em. Nothing like it, nothing! For man and beast. Saves vet's bills, as I've 'eard Mr. Eddols admit hisself."

"No doubt."

"Miss takes after the guv'nor. Short in 'er temper, too, when some dam fool lames a good 'orse, which 'appened yesterday. Feller from Cronmouth a-jammin' through places where a man o' sense would go round. But 'ot fomentations will do the trick. We 'ad a rare game about six months ago. A gentleman living in the Forest bought a nice little 'orse from a friend. Risky work! But we all knew the 'orse, a cut-and-come-again customer. Gentleman gave sixty quid for 'im. 'Orse goes dead lame. Gentleman fancies 'isself as a bit of a farrier; doesn't call in a vet; swears by the 'oly poker that the 'orse 'as navicular. Guv'nor took a squint at the 'orse, friendly like, and said 'e didn't believe it. That makes the gentleman very 'ot in the collar. In the end, guv'nor buys the 'orse for a tenner. Miss Kinsman put in the whole of one Sunday—'ot fomentations! By tea-time, she pulled a black thorn, two inches long, out o' the 'orse's near fetlock. 'Orse 'as done 'is two days a week ever since. *That's Miss Kinsman.*"

"Yes," murmured Roddy thoughtfully. "Yes, Bert."

"An all-rounder," declared Bert.

Roddy walked up to the "Haunch of Venison" where indifferent bridge awaited him after tea. He

had not enjoyed a slow hunt, because, as yet, he knew nothing of hound work. The Major was out, riding Sammy, who displayed better manners. Two of the "whelps" were with him, but not Di. A man, who dealt honestly with himself, asked this question: "Which did I miss most to-day? Di or Margery."

He had begun to think of Missy as Margery.

VI

Afterwards—for reasons vital to this narrative—Roddy tried to recall the exact moment on Sunday, when he was confronted with the news, which, however startling in itself, had no particular interest at the time for him. "The Bart." and he attended Divine Service in the morning at Puddenhurst Church. Old John accompanied them, making his responses as if he were rating a pack of hounds. "The Bart." observed to our hero: "It is up to us to show the public that we, as a class, are decent, God-fearing citizens."

"Christians soldiers?" suggested Roddy.

"Right. A soldier is expected to appear on parade, what?"

Coming out of the church, which stands upon an eminence, nearly opposite to the "Haunch of Venison," Roddy happened to notice an excited group of villagers. Old John, having no Scots' blood in his veins, disapproved of the "crack i' the kirkyard." He descended the slope, followed by Roddy and "the Bart." crossed the road, and entered the hotel. "The Bart.," not Roddy, noticed groups of gesticulating people up and down the street.

"Speaking' to some sort o' scent," said "the Bart." "That was a dry discourse we had. Shall we have 'one' before luncheon?"

At the bar of the hotel they found "Captain Shell-shock."

"Puddenhurst is alive," observed "Captain Shell-shock," "and popping."

"What's up?"

"The body of a woman was found in some gorse not far from the Puddenhurst-Westhampton Road. The body was discovered this morning, but the local superintendent of police says that she was killed yesterday."

"Killed?"

"The evidence, such as it is, points to murder. Nothing short of murder could wake up Puddenhurst."

"Have they identified the woman?" asked Roddy.

"Yes. She is a stranger. She appears to have taken a job at that inn near Kinsman's Yard. What do they call it? Yes. The 'Bell.' She had been barmaid at some hotel in Plymouth. Her name was Emily Green."

"Probably a case of suicide?"

"Barely possible. Nothing was found near the body to support that theory. The skull was crashed in; and the lethal blow—so the superintendent says—must have been administered from behind."

"Poor woman!" exclaimed Roddy.

CHAPTER X

NOTES OF INTERROGATION

I

POOR woman——!

Puddenhurst repeated Roddy's apostrophe. In and about the "Bell" not much else could be said about Miss Emily Green. Mrs. Chaundy, fully alive to the sweeter uses of advertisement, accepted what was termed "a sad mishap" with Spartan fortitude.

The police superintendent and she were alone in the back parlour. The body, found by some children, had been removed to the "Bell," where the inquest—with the permission of the proprietress—would be held on Monday morning. Meanwhile Authority was collecting information from every source. Back of the superintendent's mind, animating his activities, lay the apprehension that Scotland Yard might be called in. This murder in Arcadia was indeed his first chance of demonstrating to certain bigwigs that a man of undeniable parts was wasted in Puddenhurst. He believed that he could confide in Mary Chaundy—up to a point.

But Mary, answering all questions with directness and sincerity, left her interlocutor helplessly in the dark.

"Her relatives must be advised of this, Mrs. Chaundy."

"Green never mentioned relatives to me. Flotsam and jetsam, I take it."

"No object in leaving Plymouth where you say she was at work last?"

"None that I know of."

"Um! I have been on the 'phone with the Plymouth people, none too civil. The unfortunate creature seems to have exasperated the proprietor of the 'Blue Lion' by leaving him as unexpectedly as she left you."

"Just so."

"He can tell me nothing about her. Can you?"

"She had known better days."

"Ah! What makes you say so?"

"Well, well, we women are leaky vessels. I don't ask you to take my humble opinion for more than it's worth."

"It's always worth something to me, Mrs. Chaundy."

"I sized her up as a bit of wreckage. She had clothes and jewellery that——"

"Weren't paid for out of her wages?"

"Hardly." Mary Chaundy smiled faintly.

"I must go through her rag-bag. It looks as if robbery was the motive," said the superintendent.

"There was no money and no watch or any trinkets on her person. I should like to see the other barmaid."

"She's frightened out of her life," murmured Mrs. Chaundy.

Peggy Crocks was summoned. The superintendent dealt kindly with a much flustered woman. Under considerate treatment Miss Crocks waxed garrulous.

"Must have been pretty once. Talked as good English as me and you. Bragged to me about her conquests. Weddin' ring, too, but she didn't wear it here. Useful bit o' camouflage with such a lot of killjoys about."

Presently Mrs. Chaundy came back and the three examined the effects of the dead woman. Trinkets and a pendant watch were found and some money. The superintendent frowned, because Miss Crocks was

positive that Miss Green had "just stepped out" wearing no jewellery at all. He had found no evidence of a struggle on or near the spot where the body was discovered.

"No footprints?" asked Mary Chaundy.

"Not on heather. The place was well chosen."

"Couldn't have picked a prettier spot meself," declared Miss Crocks.

"We shall know more after the post-mortem," said the superintendent. He was loath to leave the "Bell," but Miss Crocks had been pumped dry. Alone with the proprietress he murmured:

"Pretty women may get killed by brutes, but this woman could hardly have provoked that sort of assault."

"One never knows," said the wise Mary Chaundy.

"Had she any enemies? Did she speak by any chance of anyone living here? It's an odd thing that a woman of that sort should have come to a neighbourhood where she had no friends. Had she enemies?"

"I don't know. I'll say this for the poor soul. Her worst enemy was herself. Came of decent folk, I dare say. Slipped up, may be, when she was young. It says something for her that she supported herself when there was no one to support her?"

The superintendent agreed.

"I'm hoping," he said finally, "that something will turn up. Her photograph will be published. Relatives and friends will come forward. Good afternoon, Mrs. Chaundy, and many thanks."

"I wish I could have helped you, superintendent. You might have a word with Tom Kinsman."

"Tom Kinsman?" The Superintendent looked incredulous. Tom was famous for giving undivided energies to his own business. "Did Tom Kinsman know her?"

"I'm not saying that. But Green asked questions about him. I chaffed Tom a little. Nothing in it, no

doubt, but woman's curiosity. You're a married man ; you know what that is."

"What sort of questions ?"

"Was he rich and all that ? Did he hit it off with his daughter ? I pay no attention to such idle chatter."

"But I do."

"You see Tom happened to be the only person of any importance near the ' Bell.'"

"I'll see Tom Kinsman. Good day, Mrs. Chaundy."

"Call again, superintendent."

II

This confidential talk took place on Sunday afternoon, and on Sunday afternoon—as the superintendent was aware—Tom Kinsman might be found at home. He had to pass The Yard before returning to the station ; so he turned in and pulled the bright brass knob that lay to the left of a bright green door. A maid servant opened the door. Her eyes opened when she beheld His Majesty of the Law.

"Is Mr. Kinsman at home ?"

Mr. Kinsman was not at home. He had gone off in his car, immediately after breakfast. Miss Kinsman was at home.

"I'll see Miss Kinsman."

The superintendent was ushered into the parlour. Within a minute Missy walked in.

She looked pale and nervous. The superintendent was not surprised. All the women in Puddenhurst, including his own wife, were a prey to nervousness. Most of them were asking each other breathlessly : "Suppose it had been you, dear ?"

"Please sit down," said Missy. "I'm sorry my father is not here. He went to Melchester this morning."

"Yes, yes ; is he coming back to-night ?"

"I—I don't think so."

"I can see him when he returns. I dropped in on spec, Miss Kinsman."

"On—spec?"

"On the offchance that he might be able to throw some light on this murder mystery."

"It is—murder?"

"Twelve good men and true will determine that to-morrow. Of course it's murder. Could be nothing else, but it isn't my duty to say that yet. I've just had a talk with Mrs. Chaundy. Emily Green seems to have met her death in a place where she knew nobody and where nobody knew her. Mrs. Chaundy says that she asked questions about your father?"

"Did she?"

Missy spoke almost inaudibly, but that—so the superintendent decided—was more sensible than jabbering yourself into hysterics as Miss Green's co-worker had done.

"I attach little or no importance to that. You are upset, Miss Kinsman——"

"Indeed I am."

"Of course you are. When did your father hear of this murder?"

"Not till this morning—early."

"He didn't happen to say to you that he knew the woman, or had known her?"

"No, he didn't."

She spoke emphatically. The superintendent nodded and stood up.

"Your father knows everybody. I was hoping that he did know her. But, in that case, he would have said so to you, wouldn't he?"

"I suppose he would."

The superintendent took his leave.

Missy went upstairs, locked her bedroom door, and flung herself upon her bed in an agony of misery and apprehension. She was far beyond the relief of tears.

Fate, Destiny, some vast uncontrollable Power, amorphous, incomprehensible, seemed to have whirled her to dizzy heights, whence, trembling, she could look down upon the hideous, horrible events of the last few hours.

The blow had fallen at breakfast, when both father and daughter were least able to bear it without flinching. The maid servant had said, with a levity which helped to disguise agitation :

"One of Mrs. Chaundy's barmaids, her with the golden hair, was found dead not half a mile away from here. Head bashed in. Body's at the 'Bell.'"

Tom Kinsman glared at the speaker, who giggled hysterically and fled. Missy stole a glance at her father. His face had become a mask. He got up, walked to the sideboard, and stood with his back to her. Possibly, this exhibition of self-control helped the daughter quivering on the edge of confession. Had one ejaculation escaped him, she would have said : "Dad, I know who this woman is." What pity she may have felt for the woman was swamped by the flood of pity for the man. That swept every other consideration before it. He had turned his back to think, to find, if he could, some word to bridge a terrible silence.

Still with his back to her, he said quietly :

"This is a knockout. I—I saw the woman on—on Thursday last. Didn't like her looks either. All the same that fool of a girl blurted it out too sudden. It's none of our business, none. Just a beastly happening, too beastly to yap about."

"Yes, dad."

Her voice was as calm as his.

Furtively, she watched him bolting some food, unable to swallow a mouthful herself. He noticed this and pushed back his plate.

"Might have waited till after breakfast, damn her !"

Missy nodded. Tom stood up.

"I have to go to Melchester this morning. Drive myself. Back to-morrow. Put a few things into my bag."

He hurried out of the room.

Missy remained in her chair. She understood that Melchester might have been chosen for two reasons, both urgent. The dead woman's brother lived near Melchester. And an absence of twenty-four hours would give her father time to make up his mind what to do.

She packed his bag, forgetting nothing.

III

At the last moment, as she was helping him into his leather coat, he turned and caught her to him, gripping her hard, but even then he retained command over his voice:

"I had to go, Missy. Would you like to come along with me?"

"Dad, dear, there's such a lot to do to-morrow. I wish I could come, but it's quite impos., isn't it?"

She was able to smile at him, as he released her. "Impos." was an abbreviation often in the dealer's mouth. When customers shaved too large a slice off a price, the sharp "impos." impressed them.

Tom got into the car and started. Missy rushed after him.

"Stop!"

"What is it, child?"

Perhaps she had lost control of her features, puckered up in an expression of poignant anxiety. He stared uneasily at her white cheeks and too brilliant eyes.

"You'll drive carefully, won't you? Promise me you will—quick!"

"Silly kid. Why—you gave me the jumps. Yes, yes, I'll think of the tyres. By-bye!"

Throughout that day and for most of the night

following, a raging headache tormented her. Bert, poor fellow, who would have bitten his tongue out had he guessed what interpretation was being put upon a few idle words, started the headache. The Yard was buzzing with the horrible word. The nagsman voiced the most important part of any murder.

"What bothers 'em, miss, is motive. Looks as if somebody 'ad a down on the woman. She was 'it from be'ind. 'Course some tramp might 'ave done it, but a feller like that couldn't expect to get much, could 'e? And it's easy to frighten a fat floppy-lipped woman into 'andin' out what she 'as. I talked with 'er over the "Bell," parsin' the time o' day like, and I says to meself I says: 'You're a flashy one, you are, no stay to you, and no backbone.' 'Ard to believe, miss, that any rough cove as knew 'is business 'd kill such a soft pulpy Moll o' the bar as that."

Encouraged by Missy's silence, Bert continued:

"A friend o' mine in the Force, no names, told me something else. She 'ad to be back on dooty at six sharp, in 'er workin' togs, too. She stepped out o' the "Bell" at four. Told the other girl there she was goin' for a stroll. The doctor 'll 'ave something to say about it to-morrer. I make out from my friend that the job was done between five and six."

"I can hardly bear to talk about it," said Missy.

Hot fomentations engrossed her for a couple of hours. But her mind was busier and hotter than her hands.

Motive——?

The sickening thought assailed her that one man did have an overpowering motive in silencing this fat floppy-lipped creature. She knew her father's temper, the more ungovernable because normally he controlled it. He had gone out riding after four, carrying a heavy whip; he had returned late. Ordinarily, he told his daughter all the details of his business. That was a

wrought iron link between them, putting to flight dismal domestic silences. But at supper he had said nothing.

Motive——?

Ever since the woman came to Puddenhurst, now a week ago, her father must have been tormented by the fear that such a creature might turn and rend him, as she intended to do, as she had done.

If Missy had spoken as instinct prompted her——!

She had wanted to spare him, and her silence might place a rope round his neck. She writhed at the thought of that.

It may be contended by the hypercritical that such a girl as Missy ought to have dismissed from her mind as untenable the theory that her beloved father could have committed the most dreadful of crimes. She was only nineteen but she happened to be a post-war maiden. Sentimentalists may affirm what they please; psychologists know that the horror of a five years' brutalizing conflict has undermined all pre-war sensibilities about the sanctity of human life. There was a strapper in The Yard, the kindest of men, a favourite with Missy because he was devoted to his horses, ready to sit up all night with a cripple if necessary. He had told Missy, with gusto, the details of a bayonet charge.

"We saw red, Miss."

The phrase came back to her with poignant significance because, for a moment, she had seen red when she heard a certain laugh, awakening potentialities of violence hitherto latent and unsuspected.

Her father might have seen red.

Her tortured mind carried her further than that on the grim road called circumstantial evidence. Motive there was—and, probably, opportunity. Riding back, crossing the racecourse, as was his habit, he might have met her. And if so, knowing that she was leaving Puddenhurst, knowing that she had squeezed the last blackmail out of her victim, she was just the woman

to taunt him with what she had done, to fling in his teeth the final provocation :

“ Your precious daughter knows who I am.”

And then—the maddening laugh, as she turned away.

If, at such a moment, her father struck, and struck harder than he intended, could she, his daughter, blame him ?

Small wonder that she presented a pallid face to the keen scrutiny of the superintendent of police.

IV

At the inquest, the twelve good men and true, *super visum corporis*, and after listening not too intelligently to what was said by the doctor and the superintendent, and half a dozen other persons, brought in a verdict of murder against a person or persons unknown. We are concerned only with the testimony of the doctor. Death had been caused by a fracture of the skull, a wound inflicted by some blunt weapon, probably a heavy cudgel. There were no indications of other violence.

The villagers, gentle and simple, accepted the obvious hypothesis. Some wretched tramp, some desperate fellow out of employment, walking along the road, had seen a flashily-dressed woman, figged out as a counterfeit presentment of prosperity, walking alone upon the heather. It would be easy for such a man to sneak up, noiselessly, deliver a blow that might have been intended only to stun, rifle the pockets and purse, take the trinkets and vanish. Everybody predicted that he would be caught when he attempted to pawn the trinkets, but the superintendent murmured to a subordinate :

“ We know that she hadn’t any trinkets on her ; we know that she had no money in her purse.”

The evening papers had a headline :

THE PUDDENHURST MYSTERY !

V

On Monday morning hounds met at Hernshaw Telegraph; it is some distance from Hernshaw and there is no telegraph. In the Forest of Ys, everything that is termed "new" is found on investigation to be "old," and what is spoken of as a "garden" contains neither flowers nor vegetables. The nomenclature, indeed, is of interest, and has not as yet been adequately explained.

"The Bart." motored Roddy to the meet, where he found Rescue and the other Kinsman horses in the charge of Bert and Missy. Once more, to his surprise and mortification, Roddy was able to extract nothing but monosyllables from the dealer's daughter. She appeared to be engrossed with business, fussing over bits and bridles and martingales with an energy that struck the novice as overdone.

"Have I offended her?" he asked himself, as he mounted Rescue and approached Harry Slufter. "What a creature of moods she is, as high strung as they make 'em. Looks very seedy this morning, pale as a ghost."

The Captain and everybody else were chattering about the "mystery." Puddenhurst had been stirred to its placid depths. The more elderly Foresters were furious. The gentleman on the bay pony voiced the views of his generation:

"This is the limit. The damned place is not fit to live in. I blame the Government. If two million men were not out of work this poor devil of a woman would be alive. Now, I suppose, we shall have detectives nosing about everywhere disturbing the peace."

Roddy smiled. As a "foreigner" he had grasped the essential fact: any disturbance of the peace in the Forest of Ys was the unpardonable sin.

The gentleman on the bay pony continued:

"Hark to 'em! Did you ever hear such a cry?"

I'm glad I'm not hunting hounds this morning. The Master won't be able to hear himself think for the yapping. I've half a mind to go home."

Roddy drew the Captain aside.

"What's the matter with Missy?"

"Missy? What d'ye mean?"

"She looks as if somebody had hit her on the head with a fence rail, and she's barely civil."

"Kinsman temper," said Harry cheerfully. "Old Tom gets like that at times. Leave her alone; that's my tip."

The tip seemed to be sound. What was Hecuba to an authorized clerk on the Stock Exchange?

Presently the Master disappeared with the tufters. A long wait impended. By special request the field were invited to kick their heels on the coldest and bleakest spot in the Forest. Rescue, philosophical beast, consoled himself with a mouthful of gorse. Roddy lit a cigar. Out of the corner of his eye he watched Missy, not Di, who was talking, as usual, with Sir Monty. Missy appeared to be having an altercation with her nagsman.

"Guv'nor won't like it, Miss."

"You take your orders from me, Bert."

"Yes, miss, but 'e's a rare 'andful, and a long wait 'll drive 'im mad."

"Waits are enough to drive anybody mad," said Missy fiercely. "I'm going to ride that horse, and that's all there is about it."

The horse, a raking chestnut, was being led up and down by a strapper. Bert had ridden him to the meet. Tom had bought the chestnut from another dealer, with the intention of schooling him till the end of the season. If hunting began again at the end of July, Tom hoped to get a good price for him. The horse, obviously, was short of work and full of corn. Bert had not enjoyed a rough ride on him.

" 'Ave it your own way, miss. But don't give 'im 'is 'ead. Reg'lar star-gazer, too. I put a standin' martingale on 'im, but 'e don't like it."

"Take it off."

"If I do, 'e'll be on 'is nose in the rough."

"Do him good," said Missy grimly. "He won't come down twice."

"Guv'nor won't like it," grumbled Bert, as he approached the chestnut, who lashed out at him.

Roddy said to the Captain :

"I say, Harry, she isn't going to ride that brute, is she? "

"Looks like it."

Bert shortened the stirrups, and Missy dropped into the saddle. The chestnut plunged.

"Let go! "

Bert and the strapper hopped out of the way, as the chestnut shot into the air, bucking viciously, determined to discharge a lady passenger.

"She means to set about him," said the Captain.

Missy jerked the chestnut's head up (it was between his knees) and administered punishment. The animal reared and kicked and fly-bucked, as the whip rose and fell first on one shoulder then on the other.

"Magnificent," murmured old John.

Within five minutes, she had tamed him. He trotted up the road and back, arching his neck. Missy patted him, and made much of him, keeping him away from the other horses.

"I wish I could have done that," said the Captain.

"She's worth five hundred a year to old Tom."

Disaster followed. A fine buck crossed the road, lower down than was expected. Two out of six tufters followed him. Four were stopped, but the mischief was done. The only hunt servant available and half a dozen eager followers dashed after the two tufters.

"A good hunt wrecked," said the Captain.

And, alas ! it was so. The Master and a whip came out of the enclosure to learn that the buck had outwitted them. If the two tufters could be stopped, all would yet be well. They were not stopped till they reached Shale Park, some two miles away, crossing a bog which made pursuit impossible.

One of the many misadventures of sport with buck hounds.

The Master, later on, drew a cover, with the pack, rarely a successful operation, unless it is known that a deer is lying in it by himself. Hounds ran into a herd of does. As a climax, heavy rain came on. Old John observed calmly :

“ Home is never so sweet as after a blank day.”

Disgusted followers ate their sandwiches, emptied their flasks, lighted cigars and pipes, and jogged back to stables—wet to the bone !

Nobody was more disgusted than Roddy. Missy, apparently, declined the honour of his acquaintance. “ The Bart.” seemed to have established a monopoly of Di Pundle.

Our hero contemplated a speedy return to Capel Court.

CHAPTER XI

ALARUMS AND EXCURSIONS

I

WITHIN twenty-four hours of the delivery of the verdict at the coroner's inquest printed bills appeared offering a substantial reward for any information that might lead to the arrest of the murderer or murderers of Emily Green. Soon afterwards a photograph of the unfortunate woman was published in *The Daily Mail*. The photograph had been found by the superintendent in the "rag-bag." At best, it was not a flattering likeness. And when Missy saw it, she thought that nobody would identify it as being the portrait of Mrs. Kinsman.

Meanwhile, the superintendent had made a discovery which was not given to the gentlemen of the press. The clothes taken from Emily Green were too carelessly examined when they had been removed from the body. After the verdict, the superintendent examined them again. The stays worn by the deceased arrested attention because they were double-faced, or lined. Between the lining and the outer cover the superintendent found ten new ten pound Bank of England notes, and the numbers of these ran consecutively. It was reasonable to infer that the notes had not been in circulation. Probably they came from some bank. This was the first real clue. The fact that the numbers ran consecutively justified the further inference that one hundred pounds (or more) had been given to Emily Green.

By whom ?

The superintendent examined the stitching through a lens, coming to the conclusion, rightly or wrongly, that a neat job in needlework had been done recently. There are two banks in Puddenhurst, and the superintendent lost no time in approaching the managers. One of them was able to declare that the notes had passed through his hands. Two minutes later all that the manager knew was noted down by the superintendent. Upon the previous Wednesday, Mr. Thomas Kinsman had presented a cheque for a hundred pounds, payable to self, and had asked particularly for ten ten pound notes. Pledging the manager to secrecy (an unnecessary formality), the superintendent withdrew.

The publication of the photograph achieved results not altogether satisfactory. Many persons living in Devon were prepared to give, or sell, information concerning Emily Green. The superintendent rushed down to Plymouth. The shrewd Mrs. Chaundy's prediction was verified. The deceased woman had worked as a barmaid in many hotels, always under the name of Emily Green. But, intermediately, she had assumed other names with the honorary title of Mrs. attached to them. When the Mr., whoever he might be, ceased to support the Mrs., she supported herself under a maiden name.

Nevertheless, despite untiring energies, the superintendent returned to Puddenhurst in ignorance of the fact that the deceased's right name was Kinsman. Not a man, woman or child of Miss Green's numerous acquaintance had ever heard of Tom Kinsman.

The superintendent—it may be contended—should have gone to Tom Kinsman and asked him forthwith what he had done with a hundred pounds in notes. A dealer in horses might have paid that amount for a horse to anybody. And this, indeed, occurred to the superintendent. Then he remembered what Mrs.

Chaundy had said about questions asked concerning the Kinsmans. Was Tom rich, for example? Consulting his notes, he satisfied himself that this particular question had been asked early in the week before Tom presented his cheque at the bank, and the question, no doubt, had been answered in the affirmative. Tom Kinsman was considered if not rich, well-to-do.

For the moment, therefore, the superintendent left Tom alone. If he wanted him, he could find him. An ambitious official hoped to score off his own bat. By this time, he had scrapped the theory that the murder had been committed by a tramp. That hypothesis might be deemed possible rather than probable. The woman must have come to Puddenhurst for a definite object: to wit—to get this hundred pounds sewn so cleverly into her stays. Having secured the money, she at once gave her employer a week's notice. She intended to return to her own county. In fine, a shrewd fellow put his finger upon this much of the truth—the hundred pounds must be blackmail, extorted from Tom Kinsman or from some person to whom Tom had given that exact amount of money.

Superintendents of police, in real life, do not leap hastily to conclusions. They are trained to act under explicit instructions. Blunders which may lead to the arrest of innocent parties are not regarded by high authority as negligible.

The superintendent told himself (withholding the tale from the wife of his bosom) that blackmail supplied the missing link of motive.

II

Missy had remarked at the meet that "waits" were maddening, and she was not thinking of tedious tufts, when she spoke so fiercely.

What should she say to her father when he returned

from Melchester? An intelligence, possibly over-sharpened in a business that exercises acute wits served her only too well. She realized her own position. If, in a moment of fury, provoked beyond endurance, her father had killed this woman, he had done so to save his daughter from learning something that would distress her immeasurably. If she told him that she knew the truth, that the knowledge so carefully withheld for years was hers, the crime would have been committed in vain.

She was only nineteen and it seemed better to say nothing, to hope and pray that a mystery would remain so for ever.

Tom drove into The Yard during the afternoon of Tuesday. Even to Missy's critical and anxious eye he looked outwardly much the same as usual. To her amazement he discussed with her business details: he spoke of horses that he had seen, the falling price of forage, costs of transportation, etc. . . . Of the Puddenhurst mystery not a word!

Fortified by this exhibition of self-control, the daughter dissembled in her turn. Fortunately for both of them The Yard, at the busiest season of the year, engrossed their physical energies.

A few days passed.

Puddenhurst became a target for barbed shafts of comment and conjecture. Idle gentlemen wrote indignantly to the papers asking why Scotland Yard was not invited to clear up the mystery. As the gentleman on the bay pony had foreseen the peace of Arcadia was disturbed. The scene of the murder attracted innumerable trippers from Cronmouth and West-hampton. Years before there had been similar excitement over the escape of a python from a travelling menagerie. The python—so it was reported—had swallowed a donkey! Fathers of families ordered their children not to wander from the high roads.

Nervous ladies refused to leave their houses. Eventually the python, about four feet long, was found by its owner asleep under a bush. He carried the reptile back to its box, and peace once more descended, like a brooding dove, upon the Forest of Ys.

On the Saturday following, just one week after the murder, Tom and Missy went to bed earlier than usual. They were tired after a hard day. Missy, at any rate, dreaded going to bed unless she was too weary to lie awake and think. She attempted to put thought from her because it drove her mad.

She undressed, slipped into bed, and fell asleep. Her father's bedroom was opposite to hers, across a narrow passage; the servant slept in a comfortable attic.

Tom turned in about the same time, but he didn't fall asleep. Each night, ever since the death of his wife, he had considered and reconsidered his decision to pursue a policy of inactivity. A weaker man might have identified the dead woman as his wife. Quite apart from the possibility of finding himself suspect by the police, Tom, during his absence from home, had weighed the chances for and against Em'ly's identity being established. He knew what the superintendent found out at Plymouth and elsewhere. For more than twelve years Em'ly had worked and idled under various names. Green was not her maiden name. She had assumed it derisively, for green she was and felt when the bagman left her. Tom knew that she had cut loose from her family. Upon rare occasions he met her brother, a respectable, hard-working farmer. Tom told the brother that Missy believed her mother to be dead. The brother had replied bitterly: "She is dead—to *us*."

The odds, therefore, in Tom's opinion, were against identity being established. Had Em'ly kept his letter, it would have been found by the police at once. What

had she done with the hundred pounds ? That bothered him, because he was clever enough to know that the crisp bank notes might be traced to him. Probably from his knowledge of her, she had hidden them so cunningly that the local searchers had failed to find them. Tom heartened himself up with the reflection that nobody would suspect such a woman of having so large a sum of "ready" in her possession.

His "fixed idea" remained fixed. Missy must never know the truth.

On this Saturday night, he lay awake for at least a couple of hours. He was dozing off, when the rattle of gravel against his window-pane made him sit up in every sense of the word. Presently there was another light fusilade. Tom hurried to the window and opened it. He guessed that Bert might be standing below in the yard. Something must have gone wrong with one of the horses.

Stars were not too numerous in a cloudy sky. Tom could make out a tall figure.

"That you, Bert?"

"It's I, Tom."

Mary Chaundy's voice floated up to him.

"You, Mary?"

"Shush-h-h! Let me in quietly."

Tom arrayed himself in dressing-gown and slippers. Puddenhurst has no service of electric light, but gas had been laid on recently. Tom lit one small jet in the passage before he opened the front door. Mrs. Chaundy followed him into the dining-room, well curtained and with a fire still smouldering in the grate. He could see that his visitor was trembling.

III

Mary Chaundy sat down. Tom faced her, standing on the hearth-rug. He remembered that she had come

to him late at night, long ago, when Missy was seriously ill. But she had not trembled then.

She spoke quaveringly :

" I had to tell you."

" What ? "

" You are going to be arrested to-morrow morning."

" Am I ? "

Tears trickled down her cheeks. But she went on firmly :

" I—I can't tell you how I know. But you can guess. Keeping an inn I get to hear things. I don't pay much attention to what I hear, but this is different. Somebody saw you having words with Green just before she was murdered. A gypper boy has applied for the reward. . . ."

" Has he ? " murmured Tom.

" I—I feel so miserable, Tom, because I told the superintendent that Green had asked questions about you. I gave him the first clue."

" That's all right," said Tom thickly. " So you came here to prepare me for—for what I was prepared for. It was good and kind of you, Mary. I'm up against it. I did have words with Green."

She asked no questions. Tom waited an instant. He expected questions from an old friend. His respect for her increased because she did not ask them. He said sharply :

" Have you any idea who Green was ? "

" No."

" She came here to screw money out of me. . . . Want to know why ? "

" Not unless you wish to tell me."

" I've wanted to tell you about Green time and time again. You married a wrong 'un, Mary ; so did I. I married Green.

" You—you married Green—— ! "

" I married her, but I didn't murder her."

Mary jumped up.

"I know that, Tom. Perhaps I came here to-night not so much to warn you as to tell you that I—I would never believe that you would lift a finger against any woman."

Tom smiled derisively.

"I lifted my whip to her, and evidently I was seen doing it. It was in my mind to thrash her, Mary. Now, sit down again and tell me all you know."

Mary did so. A gypsy boy, not a true Romany, but one of the many rogues and vagabonds who infest the Forest of Ys, had applied for the reward offered by authority. Before such application, he had chattered in ale-houses. Finally, the superintendent had sent for the boy, a miserable, half-starved specimen, unable to read or write, terrified of the police, and on that account likely to be accepted as a credible witness because he had not applied voluntarily for a substantial reward. This boy had been skulking in the bushes near the spot where the murder was committed. He had seen Emily Green, whom he described as a lady, walking across the less frequented easterly end of the racecourse. He had also seen a horseman. Gypsies depend for their livelihood upon their eyes and ears. This gypsy crouched down in the furze and used both. His testimony of what he saw and heard couldn't be shaken by the superintendent. The man and the woman had quarrelled. The man remained on his horse. When the woman edged away from him, he followed her. Finally, he had raised his whip. Then the gypper boy, frightened out of his wits, had bolted back to his encampment about half a mile away.

Tom listened to this, puffing at his pipe; the hand that held the briar never shook. It may be conjectured that he was keyed to such mental tension that his body remained inert, as if paralysed. When Mary finished, Tom said imperturbably:

"Still quite sure that I didn't do it?"

"Yes," said Mary. "But I wonder why you let us all think that your wife was dead."

"My mistake, Mary. I started lying to Missy about her angel mother, and I had to keep it up—see?"

Mary made no comment. Suddenly, during the short silence that followed, Tom's eyes turned towards the door of the room and with them his head. He was listening intently. Mary wondered whether authority was not waiting for the morrow. She, too, had heard something rustling in the passage.

Tom tip-toed across the carpet and flung open the door.

Missy, in her night gear, with two long plaits of hair framing an anguished face, stumbled forward into her father's arms.

IV

She was the first to speak.

"I—I heard a noise; I—I came down; I couldn't help listening; I—I had to listen; I heard every word."

"My poor lamb," said Tom tenderly.

Missy's eyes met her father's, steel to steel. Her lids fell; her head sank upon his shoulder.

"She's fainted," said Tom. "You had better go, Mary. I shall be here when they come for me to-morrow morning."

"I knew you would be. You're not one to run away."

He laid Missy upon the sofa and held out both hands to Mary Chaundy.

"Bless you, Mary. I dare swear you understand a lot of things now that may have queered me a bit in your eyes before."

"Perhaps I do," she answered.

Missy recovered consciousness as Mrs. Chaundy slipped out of the house. Colour flowed back into her cheeks

and heart. She seemed to be returning to a different world, joyous again because it held a father not guilty of the dreadful charge against him. If he was innocent she could tell him everything. And innocence had been established. She had heard it on his lips, but she read it in his eyes.

"Dad—I thought you had done it"

She was sitting up and Tom sat beside her with his arm round her. She felt him gripping her, as he said in stupefied tones :

"You—*you* thought *I* had killed that woman ? "

She clung closer to him :

"Didn't you want to ? " she whispered.

"How, in thunder, child, have you guessed that ? "

"Dad, dear, I know who she was. I know how she wanted to hurt you through me. She came to me, she told me the beastly truth, and then, then she laughed at me. When she laughed I knew that the truth had been told, and I—I could have killed her for laughing, not, dad, because she had hurt me—you believe that, don't you?—but because she meant to hurt you. . . ."

Her voice died away. Tom gripped her more tightly, as the significance of her words penetrated to his marrow. The thing he had dreaded most in the world had revealed his daughter to him after a fashion undreamed of. He was too moved to speak. Missy went on :

"I have some of your obstinacy, dad, and too much of your temper. Luckily, you were away. I swore to myself that she should not use me to strike at you. And then so much came back to me—quite clearly, wonderfully so. Perhaps one never forgets anything. Somewhere, in some queer corner of our minds, the record is there ; we can read it when the right moment comes. Dear dad, you pretended to me that she was a good mother, but she wasn't. As a tiny kiddie she

frightened me. That hard laugh——! I can hear it now. She was always slapping me and pushing me out of her way. . . .”

Tom gasped out :

“That you should remember it——!”

“I have read in the papers what sort of woman she was. I can imagine what you suffered before she left you.”

“It was hell,” said Tom simply.

He stood up, facing her, standing still, thinking hard.

“We must talk this out now,” he said firmly. “I must think harder than I ever thought before, child. Will you catch cold?”

She shook her head; his solicitude warmed her through and through. He made up the fire, before he spoke again, and relighted his pipe.

“I met her,” he admitted, “at the place where her body was found. We met by chance. I had ridden over to Hernshaw, and was coming back, walking, cooling off my horse. She stopped me. Mind you, I never guessed that she had seen you. And she must have believed that you had told me of her visit to you. That accounts for what followed. She grinned at me. I thought she was grinning because of the money I gave her, but you don’t know about that?”

“Yes; I do. She told me. One hundred pounds. You were swindled out of it, dad.”

“I was, Missy. Well, she grinned at me, and repeated a question which always maddened me: ‘How’s the kid?’ And then I gave you away.”

“Gave me away?”

“My answer put her wise about you. I said, grinning back at her: ‘The kid believes that she’ll meet her angel mother in heaven, but she won’t.’ She stopped grinning at that, and I might have guessed that she was up to mischief. I make no doubt, now, that the thought of more blackmail edged itself into

her active mind. Anyway, she set about the job to rights. She knew, of course, that you hadn't hurt me as she intended. Says she: 'I never promised not to tell the kid who I am.' At that, Missy, I could have killed her. It was in me to do it. I—I wanted to silence that damnable tongue for ever. But I kept my temper. Within two minutes she'd coolly touched me for another hundred. I'll cut the cackle and get to the horses. I told her in so many words to go to blazes. But I didn't leave it at that. I warned her that if she did tell you who she was I'd skin her alive. With that I cracked my whip at her, and rode off."

"And the gypper boy?"

"He was listening, of course."

Missy blinked and frowned.

"Dad——?"

"Yes, child——?"

"Did you say anything about the hundred pounds?"

"Did I? Let me think? Yes; yes; I asked her if she'd blown it in?"

"Did she answer?"

"By gosh! She did. She said: 'I've got that all right, *here*.'"

"You are sure she said 'here'?"

"I can take my oath to it."

"Then the gypper boy killed her to get the hundred."

Tom considered this:

"Mrs. Chaundy didn't convey the impression, Missy, that such a miserable lout would have the pluck to do that."

"If you didn't kill her, dad, somebody must have done it. The papers have talked for ever and ever about motive."

"Yes; I wondered what had become of those Bank of England notes. I knew they might be traced to me; I knew, too, that somebody might identify her as my wife. I took big chances, Missy."

"For me," she whispered. "Shall I ever forget that?"

"I must face the music to-morrow," said Tom. "I've been in a worse hole. Lord love a duck, I remember once when I was nicking in to hounds and quite alone. Riding a young horse, too. We came to grief in a big blind ditch. That horse lay on me for a lifetime. He was kicking and struggling. I said to myself: 'Only the Lord can save me.' And He did. Perhaps He'll do it again. To-morrow, when they come for me, *bright and early*, hay——?"

"Dad—don't!"

"There's a funny side to everything, Missy. Now, you hark to me. This case is black against me. I know it. You and Mary, thank God! believe me to be innocent, and innocent I am, but innocent men have been hanged before now. No more camouflage, my girl! When they come for me I shall own up that this woman was my wife. Perhaps they know that already. Perhaps they don't. I'll make 'em a present of 'motive.' The thing that bothers me most is—you will be left alone here. Cruel——!"

"I can manage."

"You're a rare plucked 'un, but a man is wanted. And I think I can lay my hands on him."

"Who is he?"

"The Commander."

"Mr. Selwin?"

"I call him the Commander. He wasn't given the command of a destroyer for nothing. You send for the Commander."

To his astonishment, Missy hesitated, twisting her fingers, as she murmured:

"I—I don't think I could. He's—he's a stranger, Dad."

"Come off it."

"But he is."

Tom frowned at her.

"I say he isn't. We did our best for him. That young fellow has brains and pluck. He'll *act*. No moss on the Commander! He'll get the right Counsel for me. He'll stand by. You send for him."

"Yes," said Missy with her face aflame.

On the morrow, bright and early, the officers of the law arrested Thomas Kinsman upon the charge of murder. The usual warning was given portentously, by the superintendent.

CHAPTER XII

RODDY STANDS BY

I

It was not necessary to send for Roddy. The news of Tom Kinsman's arrest thrilled Puddenhurst before church time. Immediately following the first shock came another. The dead woman had been Kinsman's wife. He had admitted this when he was arrested.

The circle of fox hunters, staying at the "Haunch of Venison," gathered together in the smoking room, which opens upon a pretty garden, where old John, in fine weather, smoked his cigar and gave himself up to the pleasures of memory. He was the first to speak to a burning scent, and when the first hound speaks it is termed, technically, a challenge.

"I don't believe it."

"Nor do I," said Roddy.

"The Bart." and "Captain Shellshock" shook their heads, but they were not thinking of Missy. Both to Roddy and old John belief in the father's innocence was radically based upon the daughter. Missy's father had not done this horrible thing. "The Bart." and "Captain Shellshock" spoke together:

"They don't arrest—I beg your pardon—I beg yours—please go on!"

"The Bart." went on:

"I say the evidence must be overwhelmin', what? Somebody, they tell me, saw him biff her on the back of the head. She was a real wrong 'un. I'm most

awfully sorry for Tom, good chap and all that, eh? Allow for frightful provocation. Lot of tosh talked about never liftin' one's hand against a woman! Tom—I'll have a fiver about it—biffed a devil. I hate punishin' mares. But I hit and hit hard when the devil's in 'em."

"I don't ride such horses," observed "Captain Shell-shock" mildly. "And I wouldn't marry a woman possessed of a devil."

"Daresay you'll shog along single all your days," said "the Bart." "Of course he did it, and he ought to have owned up instanter."

"He didn't do it," said old John.

"Want to back your opinion?" asked "the Bart."

It was notorious that old John never wagered more than sixpence, and played bridge for a shilling the hundred. Roddy said quietly:

"I'll back my opinion."

"A level hundred, what?"

"A level hundred? Done."

"The Bart." pulled out a notebook and recorded the wager.

"Easy money," he reflected.

Roddy went to his bedroom.

He had survived a devastating week. Probably there is nothing so upsetting to a young man of any decision of character as the discovery that he cannot control his own emotions. It is galling, too, to reflect that if you sigh for the moon, that orb'd maiden remains indifferent to you, serenely inaccessible. Add one thing more to the melting pot. An acute sense of having behaved like a fool is mortifying to the pride, because history, in individuals as in nations, has the derisive trick of repeating itself. Roddy had fallen in love with Di Pundle. He fell out of love with a disconcerting jerk. That had happened to him before. The cause of such disasters was obvious. The elusive

She beguiled him, challenging interest and curiosity. Her elusiveness was her greatest charm. Hide and seek must have been played by Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden. Virgil touches the theme and adorns it. Galatea flings the apple; she flies to the willows; the man follows; inflamed by the ardour of the chase. And then how often he is disenchanted!

The intimacy of the hunting-field, deliberately sought by our hero, soon revealed Di to him as prettier than her sisters, amiable, fairly intelligent, but cut unmistakably to pattern. The more he liked her, the less he loved her.

Sensible that Cupid was laughing at him, Roddy turned from love to friendship. He resolved to make a pal of Missy. She happened to be the first young woman who had inspired in him a sincere desire for friendship. It would be "jolly" to be friends with her. He could talk to Missy without posing as a horseman. It is likely that imperfect powers of dissimulation handicapped happier relations with Di. The Pundles had accepted him as a sportsman. Roddy saw the humour of the situation, but, as a sportsman, was it sporting to understudy "the Bart."? Really, and he admitted this frankly to himself, Messrs. Toomes, Doswell and Griffin had imposed upon him the task of living up to a "kit." They had labelled him, tricked him out as a "workman," made a mummer of him. He damned these worthy tradesmen in language that is heard in ward rooms in the tropics.

To his dismay, the elusive She, beguiling as ever, fled from friendship as precipitately as Galatea!

For more than a week, Missy had evaded him.

Good sport, even to a novice, might have presented compensations. But, throughout that miserable week, scent remained catchy and bad. April showers dampened enthusiasm. Your true sportsman accepts rain and shine as they come. When the sun shone,

Roddy did not shine. Repeatedly, he lost himself with no Missy to pilot him back to hounds. Both Rescue and Tipperary, on these unhappy occasions, turned heads towards stables. They seemed to understand that a novice must be delivered safe and sound at The Yard. Tipperary, when standing still on soft ground, would lie down and roll. . . .

Enough has been said. Roddy, indeed, would have returned, as was hinted, to Capel Court, but he saw the derisive faces of Bandycutt and Gannaway; he could hear their bantering remarks, with prehistoric allusions to "Mr. Briggs" in the hunting field.

"I shall stick it out," said Roddy.

II

Alone in his bedroom, self was forgotten. He compared his bad week with Missy's, and felt humiliated. Then he faced her position.

Friendship became impassioned.

And so it came to pass that Roddy went to Missy before she sent for him. He hurried down to The Yard, where he encountered Bert, whose smile, so Roddy thought, was recognizable as such.

"Lordy! But I thought you'd weigh in, sir. Ain't it awful? It fair gets my dandruff up."

"He didn't do it," repeated Roddy.

"Not if it were never so," agreed Bert.

"I must see Miss Kinsman."

"If I knows 'er, and I do, she'll see you, sir. She was out in The Yard not ten minutes ago, cool as a cowcumber. She ain't to be downed by anything. Guv'nor just the same. Cracked a joke as they marched 'im off. We stood by, like mutes at a bloomin' funeral. Guv'nor catches my eye, and winks, yes, winks at me."

"'I ain't a corpse yet,' he says, 'but murder will be done when I gets back if you boys don't attend proper to my 'orses.'"

"I don't think that Mr. Kinsman need worry about that, Bert."

He slipped something into the nagsman's honest paw, crossed the yard, and rang the front door bell.

Missy opened the door.

"I had to see you," said Roddy.

Missy led the way into the dining-room.

"Before you say a word," said Roddy, "I want to tell you this: Sir John and I believe in your father's innocence."

"Thank you, Mr. Selwin. Please sit down. Father was right, as usual. He asked me to send for you. I'm—I'm glad I didn't have to send."

"Your father told you to send for me?"

"Yes; he said you'd—act."

"Tell me all you know."

At any other moment, she would have smiled. Hitherto she had beheld Roddy as the novice, who deferred humbly to experience. His modesty appealed to her. In fancy, it is true, she had caught a glimpse of the dashing Commander, fearless in danger, resourceful, the master of situations, and the glimpse had whetted appetite. Now, he had changed manner and deportment. He spoke curtly: he squared his shoulders; he protruded a chin.

Missy obeyed—orders.

When she finished, Roddy remained silent. Even he, optimist and enthusiast, was aghast at the weight of evidence. Having sat on courts-martial, familiar with the *principia* of criminal law, knowing, as he did, that common law was founded upon common sense, he realized his helplessness. Some malicious spirit of evil had enmeshed an innocent man.

His first words were not too happily chosen.

"We must get the best man in the kingdom to defend your father. I will see to that."

Missy understood that things must be desperate indeed. She said quaveringly :

"That gypper did it."

"From what you say, Miss Kinsman, the gypper is half baked. If, as you suggest, he did do it to rob his victim of a hundred pounds, those notes will be traced back to him. You say she was not wearing her trinkets."

"I read that in the papers."

"How little we really know! You and I can only be sure of this: a man like your father is not arrested on a trumped-up charge. The superintendent knows what he is about. So your father said I'd act. I have been acting for a fortnight, pretending to be what I'm not. I shall try to justify your faith in me."

He stood up. Missy rose with him. He took her hand and pressed it reassuringly :

"You have sent for your father's solicitor?"

"Yes. He lives in Westhampton. I 'phoned him two hours ago. He is coming over."

"I suppose there will be a preliminary enquiry, something before justices. I don't know. I'm afraid bail will not be allowed. Sir John would offer it."

"You are a true friend."

"I am. I tried to thrust friendship on you when you were suffering agonies of apprehension. Forgive me."

"Indeed there is nothing to forgive."

"Be of good cheer! I—I love a fight, if there is something worth fighting for. Believe this: justice in England is the basic fact of national life. And character tells enormously, even with not too intelligent juries."

Missy smiled faintly through unshed tears.

III

Roddy saw Kinsman's solicitor later on the same day. The lawyer, after listening to everything that his client

had to say, and understanding clearly from Tom that the Commander had been called in as a friend, was outspoken as soon as he found himself alone with Roddy.

"The case is black against him, Mr. Selwin. He will have to go before the court to-morrow."

"What court?"

"Two or three local justices. Upon the evidence submitted, evidence which at present we are not in a position to refute, he will be remanded to the petty sessions next Thursday. It's lucky they are held next Thursday, because if they were held later my client would be committed to stand his trial at the assizes at Westchester, and would be sent to the Westchester goal. Now, he will be kept here till Thursday, and, under the circumstances, nobody will be allowed to see him except me. Between now and next Thursday we must try to discover the murderer. The superintendent arrested Kinsman without a warrant. No warrant is necessary in cases of felony. The evidence against our poor friend is this: for fifteen years he has allowed everybody, including his own daughter, to believe that his wife was dead. The superintendent can prove what manner of woman she was. The blacker he paints her, the greater the motive for getting rid of her. She comes here to extort blackmail and gets it. Unhappily my client has admitted that the woman, after getting this hundred pounds from him under the solemn assurance that she would leave Puddenhurst, most maliciously told the daughter the one thing that would justify a furious outbreak of temper upon the part of a man who had just paid out a large sum to secure her silence."

"But Kinsman didn't know that when he met her."

"So he says," the lawyer hesitated, adding firmly: "and so I believe, but I dare not call Miss Kinsman as a witness before these local justices. Probably—we can't blame them—they would accept any such testi-

mony from her with grave reservations. I continue : my client met this woman at the place and about the time when she met her death. He was seen to meet her. This gypper boy will swear that they quarrelled, and that Kinsman raised a heavy whip to her. Whereupon the boy bolted, frightened out of his wits. It is in his favour, as a witness, that he was too frightened to apply for a substantial reward. He chattered, and the superintendent had to send for him. Clever counsel, possibly, will discredit this little vagabond as a witness, but his story, on the face of it, is credible. More, Kinsman doesn't deny it. In short, it will be shown to-morrow that a man, not of the best of tempers, met a woman whom he had every reason to loathe and fear. So long as she lived she was a menace to his peace of mind. They happened to meet in a lonely spot. Next day, the woman's body was found. Her skull was fractured. The doctor testified that the lethal wound was inflicted by some heavy blunt weapon, just such a whip as Kinsman was carrying. There is no evidence whatever to show that the woman was assaulted indecently. There is evidence of a negative character to justify the assumption that robbery was not the motive. She had gone out for a breath of fresh air ; she had left in her room her trinkets. There was no money in her purse, but money was found with her trinkets. The scene of the murder affords no clues whatever. The heather keeps well its secret. Circumstantial evidence is as good as any other evidence if it be good. The justices, believe me, will have no choice ; they must remand my client till next Thursday."

"What hope can you offer me, his friend ?"

The solicitor shrugged his shoulders. Roddy liked his clear alert eyes, the thick-set figure, the carriage of a square head.

"Hope ? I tell you frankly, Mr. Selwin, that if Tom Kinsman had killed her in a moment of passion, my task

would be easier. Probably, he would have got off lightly, a few years' imprisonment. But he pleads 'not guilty.'"

"He isn't guilty."

"I take his word for that. We must do our best, and there are leaders at the bar who take up these cases and win through. But I'm not, I dare not be, too sanguine."

"Will the evidence of a half-witted boy send such a man to the gallows——!"

"You go too fast. It is improbable that the last penalty would be exacted, but—imprisonment for life. . . ."

"His innocence must be established."

"Aye; aye. Let us work to that end."

Upon the morrow, Tom Kinsman appeared before the justices, specially convened, and was remanded to the petty sessions.

IV

Roddy was allowed to see Tom for a few minutes and achieved this much: he heartened up the little man by making plain that one friend believed in his innocence and had never questioned it from the first. When the young man grasped the dealer's hand at parting, he said solemnly:

"I'm mad keen about this, Mr. Kinsman. I'm so keen that I'd rather not talk about it, because talk is so cheap."

"You've cheered me up, Commander, and you'll cheer up Missy. Don't let her get downhearted. She's promised me to carry on; and she will. The poor child won't have much time to think—except nights."

"I'm dreading the nights myself," said Roddy.

Later, he had a word or two with old John, who possessed (out of the hunting field) a remarkable gift of silence. Old John was said to have, also, a flair in

regard to foxes, whose habits he had studied since early boyhood. A man who hunts foxes learns how to draw inferences from trifles: a blackbird chattering along a distant fence, rooks rising into the blue, cattle or sheep with their heads up, may indicate Reynard's line when hounds are at fault.

Red in the face, breathing heavily, old John made a wise observation.

"Queer thing, my boy, that this superintendent had to send for the gypsy. From my knowledge of the rascals, they always claim rewards before they've earned 'em. This boy skulking in the gorse had earned the reward. Why didn't he claim it at once?"

"I—I don't know."

"You might find out."

As Roddy, with knit brows was considering this suggestion, old John continued:

"As a rule I don't tinker with the blooming amateur. This solicitor, if he knows his job, will engage the best talent—counsel, 'tecs and all that. You mustn't soil their ground. But you have a very honest phiz. . . ."

"Thanks, Sir John."

"Not at all. It's an asset. And you're hunting down here, excited about this murder, eh? If you rode into that gypper encampment, you might—I don't say you would—you might hit a line."

"Yes," said Roddy, pensively.

V

He rode forth on Rescue to encounter disappointment. The gypsy encampment had moved. Roddy looked ruefully at the black cinders of camp fires, at a few dirty rags, at a shocking pair of discarded boots. Fortunately, as he was moving off a man appeared leading a rough Forest pony. At the moment Roddy was thinking that this sudden change of encampment was in itself suspicious. The man with the pony assured him that

gyppers had to move on according to Forest law, more honoured in the breach than in the observance. As a rule—so Roddy was informed—they didn't wander far. In this case the man with the pony happened to know where they were, about a mile away.

Much encouraged, Roddy jogged on.

Before he reached the fresh camping-place, some ragamuffins rushed out of some bushes and demanded *backsheesh*. Roddy threw to them coppers. They grinned at him, and he grinned back at them. A few questions, and the prospect of more *backsheesh*, provoked from the ragamuffins an invitation to look at their tents, picturesque enough to challenge the attention of any visitor to the Forest of Ys. A bold young woman sauntered up, offering to tell a fortune.

"I'll have a bob's worth," said Roddy.

He didn't get value received, but other faces peered out of the tents, staring at the stranger. Roddy dismounted, and left Rescue in charge of a boy. He hoped that the subject uppermost in his mind would be introduced by the girl—and it was.

"Can you camp where you like?" asked Roddy.

"Oh, no, my genelman; we be moved along like. We was over Puddenhurst way day afore yesterday. You be a stranger in these parts, I reckons?"

"Yes; I'm here for a few days' hunting."

"Ah! You've heard, may be, o' the murder."

"Of course. Why this horse came out of Kinsman's yard. Did you get the reward offered?"

"Not yet," replied the girl quickly.

"You will," said Roddy.

One of the children chipped in eagerly:

"Joey was afore they beaks. He told 'un what he seed."

"Is Joey here now?"

Another child piped shrilly:

"'Course he be. He bides along wi' us."

Roddy turned to the young woman. It struck him that she was not entirely at ease.

"The boy saw the murder committed, didn't he?"

Such ignorance of the true facts evoked sharp denial.

"Not he. Joey—he's a bit soft—heard 'un squabbli', and he got afeard."

Roddy jingled some loose silver in his breeches pocket.

"I hate murders," he said pleasantly, "but I'd like to see Joey."

"Our Joey is goin' into the picshure papers, seemin'ly. Hi! Joey!"

The boy appeared from behind a tent.

Immediately, Roddy scrapped for ever the hypothesis that Joey had killed Mrs. Kinsman. The boy was half grown and ricketty, with a foolish smile hovering about a loose wobbly mouth. It was impossible to contend that such a weakling could have struck the blow that killed a robust woman.

"A genelman wants to talk to 'ee, Joey."

"I bain't afeard," said Joey.

He eyed Roddy, half defiantly, an expression that vanished as Roddy produced a shilling.

"Come over here, Joey, and tell me all about it."

"You do as the genelman bids 'ee, Joey."

With a little more encouragement, Joey embarked upon his tale, in a sing-song voice that carried quaint conviction with it. He told it as it had been told before and as it would be told again. When he finished, Roddy said regretfully:

"If you had stayed a little longer, Joey, if you had looked back even as you ran away, you might have seen the woman killed. Then you would have had the reward."

Joey's eyes remained dull, as he answered doggedly:

"I runned away, back to tents, I did. Never looked back, neither."

Holding the boy's eyes, speaking very quietly, Roddy drew his bow at a venture.

"You were frightened, Joey. I expect you frightened the others when you told them?"

"I didn't tell 'em. I told nobody but Big Ike. If you thinks I'm lying, you ask 'un."

A huge lout was indicated with a wave of a hand. Big Ike was squatting near a tent scowling at Roddy. Gypsies, wild creatures of the woods, have the instincts of all wild animals; they snuff danger from afar.

"So you told him?"

"Do 'ee ask 'un if I didn't."

Roddy sauntered towards Ike, who never budged.

"Did you see anything?"

"Nothink."

"And, after the body was found, knowing what you did, why didn't you go straight to the police?"

"'Cos I didn't. I hates they police. We gypers minds our own business."

"Quite right, too," said Roddy cheerfully. "Now you kids——! Sixpence for anybody who'll show me the short cut to Hernshaw."

"I can do that," said Joey.

The girl interposed.

"You bide along wi' me, Joey. Zeke 'll show you the way, sir."

Zeke did.

VI

Man and boy walked through the beeches on the eve of bursting into leaf. A squirrel crossed their path sped up a tree and hid itself behind a branch. Zeke danced about excitedly.

"I see 'un—I see 'un."

He pulled out of the pocket of a discarded man's coat, whose dilapidated tails almost reached the ground, a weapon new and strange to Roddy which he hurled at

the squirrel. It appeared to be a short springy stick with a round blob of root at the end of it. Again and again Zeke hurled this at the squirrel, missing it because only the tiny head was visible. Roddy, not alarmed for the squirrel's safety, was amused at the boy's dexterity, inasmuch as he would have easily hit a larger target. The squirrel dodged here and there and finally vanished.

"Ike would have had 'un."

Roddy examined with interest the primitive weapon.

"What do you call this?"

"A snog."

"A snog?"

Zeke explained that snogs were thrown at squirrels, hedgehogs, or anything else that might be slipped into stewpots. He didn't mention chickens and ducks.

"Ike has a scale."

"A scale?"

A scale, so Zeke informed him, had a knob of lead at the end of the stick. The boy chattered on about Ike's performances with a scale. Apparently, the big lout had acquired by constant practice such astounding accuracy with his scale that he could drive a nail into a tree trunk when twenty yards away. At village coconut shies Ike was "*hors concours*."

"Is big Ike married to that young woman I was talking to?"

"Naw. We gypers don't marry wi' our sisters. Ike be daffy 'bout one o' they Trumans—Lively Liz we calls 'er. But Liz won't have 'un, not even gypper fashion."

"Gypper fashion"—so Roddy was instructed—was a simple form of matrimony, archaic, which dispensed happily with the paid services of parson or registrar. The Trumans, apparently, who owned a caravan, were regarded by Zeke as a cut above dwellers in tents.

“Liz’d take Big Ike, if so be as he had a van. But we think nawthing o’ they vanners. We’d catch our deaths o’ cold if we lived in a van. That be Hernshaw, sir, over there. You can’t miss ’un.”

Zeke received sixpence, spat upon it for luck, concealed it somewhere, and ran off.

CHAPTER XIII

A LINE

I

HAD he hit a line——?

Roddy asked himself this question, as he rode back to Puddenhurst. His brain was seething with conjecture, hypotheses, which he endeavoured to co-ordinate as best he could, sensible of his disabilities.

Motive?

That buzzed in his ears.

He knew that the notes had been found by the superintendent in Mrs. Kinsman's stays, because he had so testified at the preliminary enquiry, and these notes were mentioned during the heated interview between husband and wife. If it could be shown that a listener had overheard talk which would indicate that the murdered woman carried so large a sum on her person and if that same listener had repeated what he overheard to Big Ike, *who wanted a van* (with Lively Liz inside it), *motive* was forthcoming.

Roddy cantered back to the deserted encampment. It was less than half a mile from the scene of the murder. A frightened boy, legging it across the heather, might conceivably have met Big Ike half way and spluttered out his story. Big Ike, as conceivably, could have reached the gorse unperceived by the woman. It was quite probable that he had found her, sitting down perhaps, thinking over what had passed.

If Big Ike happened to be carrying a "snog" or a "scale"——?

The scene began to reconstruct itself in Roddy's mind, now feverishly alert. He beheld this ugly savage, dominated by the overwhelming desire to get possession of a woman who demanded a van, creeping up behind his victim. He would not run the risk of getting too near. If she heard him and turned she might scream. Hidden by some bush, he might have hurled his "snog" or "scale" at an easy mark.

And then, not finding the notes so cunningly concealed, unable to make an exhaustive search for them, discovering, perhaps, that merely intending to stun his victim he had killed her, he would slink back to the encampment, back to his own people who could be relied upon to swear that he had not left the tents, if—if an alibi were demanded. Later, still under the domination of the necessity of getting hold of money, the thought of a big reward, and with it the certainty of fixing the guilt of murder upon another, Big Ike might have grasped an undeniable opportunity.

Plausible but not entirely convincing to a man who had sat on courts-martial and sifted evidence.

Roddy left Rescue at The Yard, and exchanged a few words with Missy. Of the line he might or might not have hit he said nothing. By the luck of things, even as old John had sent him hot-foot to the encampment, so Missy—without intention on her part—despatched him, nose to ground, upon what may be termed a heelscent.

"Would you see Mrs. Chaundy?" she asked.

"Certainly. But why?"

"She is so miserable. Dad and she were great friends. Mrs. Chaundy thinks that what she said to the superintendent led to dad's arrest."

"I'll see her now," said Roddy promptly. Admiration of Missy was increasing, in geometrical progression, every time she opened her firm little mouth. It was astounding that a girl of her age, placed in such a situation, should be able to think of others.

Mary and he met in the back parlour. Roddy quoted the solicitor :

"The circumstantial evidence is strong."

"Terribly so."

"But you mustn't blame yourself, Mrs. Chaundy. The superintendent, when he discovered the notes and traced them to Kinsman, was on a track that led him direct to The Yard."

This served to calm an unhappy woman. Presently the proprietress of the "Bell" mentioned Emily Green's co-worker.

"Green and Crocks were very thick, Mr. Selwin ; but the girl is flighty and not to be relied on. The superintendent frightened her. I don't say, mind you, that he wanted the girl to prove that Green had no jewellery on her when she walked out of the bar, but that's what he did. The girl swears that Green left all her trinkets with her money, locked up in a drawer. That disposed in the superintendent's mind of the robbery motive and helped to fasten the guilt on poor Tom."

"Can I see the girl ? " asked Roddy.

"Why, yes ; she goes on duty in half an hour. Do you wish to see her alone ? "

"Please."

"I'll tell her to bring you a whisky and soda."

Within a minute or two Miss Peggy Crocks appeared in working kit. As a witness, she impressed Roddy unfavourably. Her features were amorphously suggestive of fatuity and inconsequence. She looked good-natured and respectable, well-pleased with herself and ready to smile upon any young man of prepossessing appearance.

"Please sit down, Miss Crocks," said Roddy.

Miss Crocks deposited a buxom person upon the edge of a Windsor chair. She identified the Commander as Miss Kinsman's cavalier. It was Miss Crocks who had

hinted to Emily Green that the dealer's daughter was "carrying on" with a naval "horficer."

Roddy beat no bushes. His resilient mind had taken a fresh impression of Mrs. Chaundy's idle words. He wanted to satisfy himself, without "soiling ground," that an important witness for the prosecution was unreliable.

A little flattery soaped the ways. Before Roddy touched upon the crime, Miss Crocks—indulging in a mental process which calls to mind Miss Squeers and Nicholas Nickleby—was beguiled into believing that the Commander had sought her society because he realized that she was a young lady of great attractions whose portrait had appeared in the picture papers.

"When I saw your portrait, which does not do you justice, Miss Crocks, I wanted to make your better acquaintance."

"I'm always ready to oblige," murmured Miss Crocks, blushing. "This is a horrible affair, sir."

"It is," assented Roddy gravely. "You were one of the last persons to see this unfortunate woman alive."

Miss Crocks put her handkerchief to her eyes.

"And one of the first to see 'er dead. I will say that she made a be—utiful corpse, although 'er 'ead was bashed in."

"I was much struck with the importance of your evidence."

"I gave it all of a tremble."

"It is greatly to your credit that you could give it at all. Tell me—I only ask as a friend—why you were so positive that Mrs. Kinsman, we had better call her by her right name, was wearing no jewellery?"

"The pore dear showed me everything she 'ad. I was never one to poke and pry, not me, but we was working together, look, in and out of hours——"

"Yes; I can understand that she confided in you. Your sympathy and natural kindness——"

Miss Crocks, blushing and bridling, interrupted :

" I was ever so sorry for 'er. The woman always pays, don't she ? I says to myself in two jiffs : ' More sinned against than sinning, I'm shaw.' "

" I'm not surprised that you won her confidence. So she showed you all her trinkets ? "

" That she did. And a nistory to every one of 'em, too. You see she went out in a nurry—slipped on 'er cony seal coat and a nat and offed it."

" Quite."

Unconsciously Roddy frowned. He felt that he was wasting his time. This testimony, from whatever source, appeared to him unimpeachable. He finished the whisky and soda, which the barmaid had brought to him before the legal hour, and stood up.

" Thank you," he said politely.

" Not at all."

Roddy tipped her handsomely. Miss Crocks looked as if she were expecting something else. To extricate himself from an embarrassing position—Miss Crock's smiling lips were perilously close to his own—he said hastily :

" Mrs. Kinsman left you at four."

" At five minutes to four."

" How do you know ? "

" She took a squint at her wrist watch."

" *Her wrist watch*—— ? "

Miss Crocks turned pale. Roddy said sharply :

" This is the first time a wrist watch has been mentioned."

" I forgot the wrist watch," murmured Miss Crocks. " She 'ad another watch, a pendant. The superintendent found that."

" You are sure she was wearing a wrist watch ? "

" Yes, sir. She pulled back the sleeve of her fur coat and looked at it. She said : ' It's five of four, and I'll be back by five-thirty.' "

"Can you describe the wrist watch?"

"It was gold, on a leather band, quite a nice little watch—might 'ave cost six or seven pounds. The leather strap was a bit unstitched. I'd know that anywheres. Where is the wrist watch?"

"Yes—where is it?"

Acting upon impulse, half stunned by the importance of this clue presenting itself so unexpectedly, Roddy clutched the barmaid's arm.

"Look here," he said incisively. "What you have told me is of importance. You understand, don't you, that your evidence about the trinkets was printed in full. The papers accepted your evidence as conclusive. You are now in rather a hole."

"Oh, dear!" She began to whimper. Roddy patted a plump shoulder.

"Don't worry! I propose to keep this bit of evidence secret, if—if you will."

"'Course I will."

"I give you my word of honour that this wrist watch shall remain a little secret between you and me till the right time comes. When that time comes, I pledge myself that your trifling lapse of memory shall not be made a source of annoyance to you."

"You are very, very kind, sir. Someway I forgot that wrist watch. She thought a lot of the other. But the wrist watch was always under her cuffs when she was working; and she put on the other when she was dressed up,"

"No blame attaches to you," said Roddy.

II

Roddy dreamed that night of wrist watches, millions of them all alike. The one with the unstitched strap evaded him. Dreams of the troubled kind have this in common. The dreamer misses something. If he be a sportsman, it may be a pheasant sailing overhead at

the right angle. Up goes the gun. The dreamer is unable to pull the trigger. If your dreamer be a traveller he misses his train or his luggage. If he be a boxer, he cannot deliver the knock-out blow when his adversary is at his mercy. Always this sense of impotence turns a troubled dream into a nightmare.

But he awoke refreshed, and, in spite of the dream (which may have lasted only a few seconds), some kindly sprites seemed to have swept from his brain cobwebs of indecision and doubt, those gossamer threads that hamper all progress. Youth believes that youth will be served. And how often the enthusiasm of youth triumphs over the experience of age. Napoleon asked for young men.

Fox hounds met that Tuesday on the north-west side of the Forest of Ys. Was this coincidence? Roddy had learnt from Bert that the Truman van might be found at Shale Park. By this time the Commander was obsessed by a conviction that had sustained and fortified him at Zeebrugge. He believed that some kindly light was leading him on, o'er moor and fen, to a definite objective. Chasing foxes seemed as distasteful, as boring as bridge. And yet, the hounds—bless 'em!—were meeting within easy distance of the Trumans.

“The Bart.” said to him on Tuesday morning:

“You missed a fairish hunt yesterday.”

“I had business to attend to of some importance.”

“The Bart.” cocked an eyebrow. He could think of no business of more pressing importance than fox hunting.

“Can I offer you a lift to the meet to-day?”

“Yes,” said Roddy. “But I shall not be riding.”

“Saddle-weary, what?”

Roddy nodded.

He was thinking that hounds are more easily lost afoot. It was conceivable that “Lively Liz” might help him to find them again. Irrepressible instinct urged

him to talk to "Lively Liz." The same instinct had prompted him to interview the plump Peggy. At the moment he had not the remotest idea what he would say to "Lively Liz" if he found her, or what she would say to him. Possibly he recalled to mind Mr. Sherlock Holmes, who sought diligently for clues in the most unlikely places.

III

The meet was well attended. Roddy, in thick boots and stockings, mingled with the crowd of foot passengers. Amongst them he found one, Habakkuk Mucklow, better known as "Uncle." "Uncle" lived at Nether-Applewhite. Till quite recently he had run with hounds, earning many a half-crown from strangers who lost hounds. Now, in his old age, he pocketed more half-crowns from those who had appreciated his services in the past. Missy had told Roddy that "Uncle" was a character worth cultivating.

Roddy approached "Uncle." Missy was busy with her hirelings as usual. When hounds moved off she intended to return to Puddenhurst.

"Morning, Mr. Mucklow."

"Uncle" touched his hat.

"'Tis a rare scenting' marnin', sir."

"Will they find a fox?"

"Uncle" grinned at the novice. Vixens are not hunted in April and a dog fox may be found anywhere or nowhere.

"I knows what I knows," affirmed "Uncle" solemnly.

"What do you know?"

"If they draws they covers," "Uncle" indicated with a still vigorous arm a stretch of woodland that was private property, "they'll kill a fox they will."

"How do you know that?"

"Uncle" grinned again. He was not on the happiest terms with the owner of the cover. He said slily:

"Keeper had a shot at 'un yesterday, but the dam fool shot 'un behind. Hounds'll eat 'un up this marning."

Roddy laughed, wondering what "the Bart." would have said. From foxes the young man passed naturally enough to gypsies. Both deplete poultry funds. "Uncle" knew the Trumans. He pointed out a line of trees fringing the high moor.

"They bide over there."

Half an hour later Roddy was pressing on, relying upon a sense of direction strong in sailors and other migrants. He had lost hounds and himself. It was cheering, however, to hear the notes of horn dying away in the distance, although bogs, not impassable to those afoot, encompassed him. He was now in the most unfrequented part of the Forest of Ys, the part which recalls Exmoor and Dartmoor, the part where the tall red deer may be found. Here sky melts into moor and moor dissolves itself into sky. The spacious splendour of his surroundings impressed a man who had exchanged lonely seas for roaring thoroughfares. Inhaling the sou-westerly breeze, striding lightly over the crisp short heather, pausing now and again to watch a herd of shaggy ponies or some hawk poised in mid-air, it was horrible to think of an innocent man imprisoned upon a false charge, tormented by suspense, unable to fight for his own hand, dependent upon the energies and intelligence of others.

And Missy——?

Afterwards, recalling the many incidents of an amazing week, Roddy was able to look back upon this walk across the moor not as a pious pilgrimage in the service of a friend, but as a stunning revelation of his own feelings for a woman. Spring was abroad on the moor; birds were fluting in the coppices; the colour and rhythm of life imposed themselves subjectively.

Roddy had not been thinking of either Tom Kinsman or Missy as he picked his way over treacherous ground.

His thoughts were busy with "Big Ike" and "Lively Liz." For love of Liz, Ike had imperilled his life and what was dearer to a gypsy than life—his liberty. The primitive instinct to get possession of a woman had made him a murderer. Roddy had been sure of Kinsman's innocence; he was just as sure of Ike's guilt. Apart from the evidence, some driving power impossible to analyse lay behind conviction. It was unshakable as the Rock of Gibraltar; it towered above ordinary reason. Omniscience, working inscrutably towards ends not to be measured by mortals, had sent Rodney Selwin to the Forest of Ys to play his appointed part in the tragedy.

Attempting to measure the strength and intensity of a passion which provoked murder, Roddy was led to a consideration of what was animating him with equal strength and intensity in his pursuit of the murderer.

Alone upon the moor, illumination came to him.

He loved Missy. She had not captivated fancy, like the others. He could think of them derisively as anæmic ghosts, elusive shadows of the real thing. No; she had stolen his heart away imperceptibly, without any effort. In her he could recognize all that he had acclaimed in the others. And how much more. . . .

He pressed on aflame with excitement and ardour.

IV

It was past two when he reached the caravan, a conspicuous object on the brown moor. It stood amongst furze bushes upon a small common, close to the woods of Shale Park, and conveniently "handy" for the snaring of rabbits and hares, not too far from a village where foxes were held responsible for missing ducks and chickens.

Roddy approached some children. He liked children and they liked him. As before, he was importuned for coppers.

"Give us a penny, my pretty gen'leman, just for luck."

"For your luck or mine?" asked Roddy. "I'll give you a penny if you'll tell me where the hounds are."

"We ain't heard nor seen no hounds, sir. They bain't this way."

"Dear me! I wonder where I am."

He was told where he was by half a dozen piping songsters. An old woman joined the group.

"You have a nice van," said Roddy.

Near the van were tents, close to the ground, made of canvas and blankets smoke-stained and weather-worn.

"Are you real gypsies?" asked Roddy.

"'Course we be, bain't us, Granny?"

The old woman nodded. She stared unblinkingly at the stranger. Her agate-like eyes became less hard as Roddy said to her:

"I have lost hounds."

The old woman said pityingly:

"You be a stranger to the Forest."

"Yes. How far is it to Puddenhurst?"

"A long ways. You'd better stick to the road, I reckons, and may be you'd get a lift. 'Tis a matter of ten mile."

Roddy thanked her and sat down. He had some sandwiches and a flask. Heads bobbed out of the tents and disappeared. The children squatted near him with eyes as bright and alert as squirrels. Without exercising much tact Roddy soon discovered that they were all Trumans and proud of it. But he had finished his sandwiches before Liz was mentioned. The children added that Liz made mats.

"And where is Liz? I'd like to see her mats."

"Liz'll be herealong afore you finishes your pipe."

Roddy, however, smoked three pipes before Liz came into sight, swinging along by herself, whistling gaily.

Roddy's pulse quickened. He believed that Liz had the wrist watch. "Big Ike's" ugly face indicated cunning and an animal intelligence. Born and bred a snapper-up of trifles, dreading nothing on earth except the police—the avowed enemy of all vagabonds—it was unlikely that Ike would try to pawn the watch. At best he would get a couple of pounds for it. Probably he knew that the wrist watch had not been missed ; otherwise it would have been mentioned at the justices' enquiry. He desired to ingratiate himself with a young woman, a vagabond like himself. She would accept the watch without asking questions. All gypser women love trinkets. Upon this Roddy based his hypothesis. Not much to pin your faith to, but our hero, let it be remembered, had faith other than this, the faith that inspires optimists and enthusiasts. Something greater than human reason animated his activities of mind and body. More, "Big Ike" would try to get rid of the watch. That, and that alone, might incriminate him.

Liz drew near. She was a handsome girl, tall and robust, smoke-begrimed, dark-eyed and dark-haired, red-cheeked and red-lipped. From her small ears hung two gold rings ; about her brown neck hung a necklace of red beads. She wore dirty clothes, skirt, shawl, stout boots ; and her head was bare. Truly a creature of the wild.

"This dear gen'leman wants to see yer mats, Liz."

Liz glanced at Roddy alertly and smiled, exhibiting a double row of the whitest teeth. As old John had observed sapiently, Roddy's ingenuous countenance was an asset.

"Do 'ee ?" she asked.

"Yes."

"I be short o' mats. You bain't be wantin' a bee pot, or brushes, look ?"

"I'd like to see your wares," said Roddy pleasantly.

He wanted to see her wrists, but she kept her hands under her shawl.

Liz nodded and moved towards the van. She came back presently carrying a rush mat and some brushes. Roddy could see her wrists ; they were bare. Acute disappointment overwhelmed him, but he reflected that the watch might be kept for high days and holidays. He bought a small mat and paid for it. The children hovered about, chirping like sparrows. The old woman and a man or two remained in the background. Gypper men, as a rule, distrust strangers.

"I must be getting back to Puddenhurst," said Roddy. "That is a nice van of yours, might I take a look at it?"

"You come along wi' me, my dear," said Liz.

The van was inspected.

"Do you sleep in it, or in a tent?" asked Roddy.

"Me an' granny sleeps in the van."

"Can you tell me the right time?"

Liz glanced at the sun and said quickly:

"Past three, I reckons, but not much."

"Can't you give me the exact time?"

Liz laughed.

"We travellers, my gen'leman, travels by the sun."

"Really. Do you mean to say you've not got a watch?"

"Not me."

She laughed again, so mirthfully, obviously tickled at the notion that "the likes of her" would have a watch that Roddy accepted the "not me" as final. He had wandered ten miles from Puddenhurst on a fool's errand. "Lively Liz" pointed a finger at a solitary pine upon the sky line.

"Puddenhurst Road runs nigh that. Drop down hill, cross bog, up through trees, and over plain."

"Thank you."

He went his way as sorrowful as the young man in the

parable. His absurd dream had come true ; the wrist watch, with the unstitched strap, eluded him.

To add to his discomfort a sharp shower was drenching him upon the open moor. He had crossed the bog, and the trees indicated by Liz were just ahead of him. Roddy quickened his steps to gain shelter.

Very soon he found a friendly holly with a scrub oak beside it, inseparable twins in the Forest of Ys. Other hollies and scrub oaks grew thickly upon soil not too rich. As he leaned against the oak, smoking, it occurred to Roddy that this tiny wood was primeval in character. No ride intersected it ; no footpath ran through it. Horsemen would gallop round it. Even the birds seemed to avoid it as a spot too far from the haunts of men. Boggy ground encircled it, which accounted, no doubt, for its existence. Destructive forest fires, sweeping the dry heather, had left it unscathed.

Believing himself to be alone in a sanctuary of the wilderness, Roddy's quick ears heard a sound. Sound is never easy to locate. He decided that an animal, a pony or a deer, might be close to him. Deer seek shelter as men do. He turned his head. The movement saved his life. An object whizzed by his temple, grazing his cap, and fell with a thud upon a mossy bank. Roddy jumped forward to secure it. He had never seen a "scale," but he recognized what he held in his hand at once from the description given by Zeke. Upon the end of a springy stick, about two feet long, was a round knob of lead.

Roddy stood still, listening intently.

He could hear nothing.

CHAPTER XIV

TWO MEN AND A WOMAN

I

HAD Roddy looked back when he left hounds, he might have seen Missy taking more than a passing interest in his movements. Within a few minutes she, too had abandoned the chase. She walked her horse to the crest of the hill overlooking Shale Park and the two miles of intervening moor and bog. Standing behind a clump of hollies she could watch Roddy picking his way across the bog and climbing the slopes beyond.

She slipped from the saddle and waited patiently.

Presently she moved nearer to the distant caravan. Finding another clump, she waited for at least an hour, wondering what the Commander was doing. Finally, she saw him leave the gypsy encampment. Immediately afterwards, patience was rewarded. A man crept out of some gorse. She could not recognize the man, but she made no doubt that he was following Roddy.

Why?

Women possess more "flair" than men when danger impends above heads beloved by them. Missy knew that Roddy was "acting" on her father's behalf. It was likely that he might be running risks which he had failed to consider seriously. Clearly enough his quest after information had led him into the wildest part of the Forest of Ys and into intimate contact with lawless

persons. Tourists and trippers regard gypsies as romantic objects. Foresters have reason to dislike and distrust them as incorrigible rogues and vagabonds.

Missy mounted her horse.

As she did so the rain began to fall steadily. A heavy shower would wipe out visibility. She could just see that the man following Roddy had quickened his pace. And she could also see Roddy turning for shelter to the small copse to the left of him. Fortunately, she was on the right side of the bog. She could reach the copse, galloping over heather, in a few minutes.

She did so.

II

Roddy, of course, knew that whoever had thrown the "scale" was standing still, not daring to move. An assailant had parted with a trusty weapon. "Big Ike" must be within a few feet of him, as dangerous as a grizzly bear in thick chaparral. "Big Ike," evidently, had not been deceived by a stranger's interest in gypsies and travellers. "Big Ike," in fine, stood at bay, ready to charge, knowing that if he ran away pursuit would overtake him.

"I'm in for it," thought Roddy.

"Big Ike" might be reckoned tough as hickory ; he looked a bundle of bulging muscle ; he had the jaw and the shoulders of a fighter ; probably he was in tip-top condition.

"Ike——!"

He called the man by name authoritatively, facing the thick scrub that had been behind him when the "scale" was hurled. The sound that challenged attention must have been caused by the crackling of holly as Ike leaned forward to clear his arm.

No answer.

Roddy walked warily forward. He had no intention of closing with an antagonist bigger than himself. In

the wood were many open places carpeted with moss. Ike might be manœuvred into one of these.

Roddy halted. Through the scrub he could see Ike behind a tree. Nature is an accomplice when the security of wild creatures is imperilled. Ike's clothes and face were the colour of his surroundings. He seemed to melt and vanish in the greys and browns and madders of the coppice. Only the edges of him showed behind an oak.

"You have tried to kill me," said Roddy.

Ike held his tongue.

"To kill me," continued Roddy, "as you killed that woman, and with the same weapon, you dirty dog!"

The dog growled out a curse or two.

"Come out and fight," said Roddy.

As he spoke mastiff leapt upon bull terrier. Roddy side-stepped just in time, thrusting the "scale" into his pocket. Only an expert could use it. But he wanted it as evidence. As Ike shot past him, he saw with a glad heart that the gypsy was hampered by too heavy clothing; and he wore immense boots.

"I can take no chances," thought Roddy. "I must infuriate the brute."

Ike had turned. Now he stood still, crouching, ready to rush at the first opportunity, glaring at a man who was grinning at him.

"Come on, you clumsy lout. You'll be hanged for this. No Liz for you, you damned fool. She thinks you the scum of the earth, and so you are."

Ike, inarticulate with rage, rushed again. Roddy seemed to be dancing round him, jeering at him, planting his darts in a pachydermatous hide as deftly as any *banderillero* in the bull-ring at Madrid.

"What a lump of clay! Hit my face—here it is."

Roddy thrust forward his face, temptingly.

Ike let go his right. Roddy ducked and countered hard upon the gypsy's nose. He was afraid of bruising his knuckles on an iron jaw.

"First blood to me," said Roddy. "I hate hitting you, you wild ass of the desert, because it hurts me. Where will you have it next?"

He asked the question valiantly, but he was thinking that Ike might be a glutton for punishment. One mistake, and Ike would be on him. Ike belonged to what is called in transportine boxing circles the "pork and beaner" school. At local fairs he could hold his own as a rushing, tearing, down-and-out fighter. As a boxer Roddy might be reckoned a clever amateur.

Loss of blood steadied the gypsy a little, not much. His nose ached, but he ached in every fibre with the desire to get hold of Roddy. If he could grab him——!

He did so with unexpected results, unaware that a sailor may have leisure to study ju-jitsu in far Japan. He gripped Roddy's wrist and pulled him into a bear's hug. As he pulled, Roddy, as instantly pushed. Ike staggered back, and Roddy's disengaged right crashed once more upon Ike's nose.

"Wipe it," said Roddy, "if you have a wipe."

The gypper wiped his nose with a hand the size of a leg of mutton speechless with fury. Roddy's footwork made him dizzy. Our hero danced behind him and hit him under the short ribs.

"Mind your eye, you hippopotamus!"

By this time Ike was breathing heavily. But the nimble Roddy kept away from him, biding his time, not daring to attempt the knock-out. A second later, at short range, the gypsy kicked at him and nearly "got home." A right and left from Roddy on both eyes followed.

"Had enough," said Ike, dropping his hands.

Roddy incautiously dropped his hands. The gypsy jumped at him. Roddy stepped back and slipped,

falling upon his back. Ike's hands were at his throat.

He saw a murderous face above his—a last impression of evil. And then he sank into unplumbed depths of green water, choked by it. A great bell seemed to be tolling. Was it his heart?

Consciousness went from him.

III

Into water he had sunk, water restored him. As he came back to the Forest of Ys, before he opened his eyes, he felt water splashed upon his face.

Missy was bending over him.

"Are you all right?" she asked.

"Yes."

Memory returned as swiftly as it had gone. He sat up, staring about him. Close beside him lay Ike, face downwards on the moss. Ten feet away a horse was tied up by the bridle to the holly which had sheltered Roddy.

He staggered to his feet. Missy glanced at him critically, as she said coolly:

"Before I explain, we had better attend to him. He was so busy killing you that I did my best to kill him."

She pointed at a whip lying on the ground, a whip known as the hammer-head variety, suitable for opening heavy gates. With just such a whip—so the Superintendent of Police believed—Tom Kinsman had struck his wife.

"I hit hard," said Missy.

Roddy looked at her, as his wits cleared.

"You have saved my life—and your father's."

He turned Ike over.

"Stunned, nothing more," he declared. "Before we administer first aid, we'll tie his hands with your thong. Give it me."

Before she could unknot the loop of the thong from

its leather keeper, Roddy was on his knees beside the senseless man feeling and fumbling at his pockets. Once more conviction had seized him. He knew—so he said afterwards—that he would find the wrist watch before he did find it. With a cry of triumph, he stood erect.

Missy knew nothing of the wrist watch, but the expression upon Roddy's face was unmistakable.

"What is it?"

"The bit of evidence that will make your dad a free man."

"Oh-h-h-h!"

Roddy slipped the watch into his pocket and took from Missy the leather thong. To tie Ike's hands behind his back securely was a sailor's job and a sailor did it. Ike was breathing stertorously.

"He's coming to," said Roddy. "Hide your horse and yourself, Missy. Did he spot you?"

"No; I saw you cross the bog from the high moor; and I saw him following you. . . ."

"Quick! Hide!"

"Yes."

"You understand what I'm up to. A witness may be wanted later."

She nodded, took her horse, tied him outside the screen of holly and scrub oak, and crept back.

Presently Ike moved. He opened dazed eyes to behold Roddy staring at him. Possibly he was conscious that his hands were tied, for he struggled impotently.

"Keep still," said Roddy. "I lashed you up, my beauty, and I know how to do it."

Curses trickled from the gypsy's lips. Obviously his wits were working again.

"Ever been hit on the head with your own 'scale'?" asked Roddy.

The gypsy assimilated this. He had forgotten his own weapon. Deeper curses warranted the conjecture

that a savage intent on his kill had not seen or heard a third party.

"You nearly strangled me," continued Roddy, "but not quite. Now—you listen to me and stop swearing. It's a waste of energy, and if I wanted to do it, I could knock your head off at that. So keep quiet! I have a wrist watch in my pocket which may hang you."

The heavy brown face paled; into the congested eyes crept the spirit of fear.

"Your one chance, my man, is to own up to the truth. That, and that alone, may save your neck. I see you understand me. I've never met a fool yet who wasn't pretty sharp where his own interests were at stake. I was the fool, not you, because I underrated your intelligence. I bear you no malice for hunting me down, because I was hunting you. Tell the truth."

"I—I didn't mean to kill 'er."

"You didn't mean to kill her?"

Roddy repeated the words clearly.

"No; I didn't."

"You wanted a bit of money?"

"Maybe I did."

"So you threw your scale only intending to stun her?"

Ike said eagerly:

"That's Gawd's truth."

"And then you couldn't find the money, so you took the watch and bolted?"

Ike sat up, with a little help from Roddy, but he didn't answer the question. He was recovering rapidly. He began to scowl again; then he grinned; and the grin was as evil a thing, and more so, than the scowl.

"What have I bin a-sayin'?" he asked.

"If you have forgotten, I haven't."

"I be fair mazed, I be. I tell 'ee this: you makes what you likes out o' it. I found that 'ooman a-lyin'

dead, and I helped meself to her ticker. That's Gawd's truth."

"You—liar."

"That be my tale, and I sticks to 'un. I found 'ee this afternoon messin' about my Liz. And I follered 'ee along o' that."

"You have my heartiest congratulations," said Roddy. "You are a cleverer rascal than I had believed possible. You deny that you admitted just now that you threw your 'scale' only intending to stun that woman."

"Never said no such thing, s'elp me!"

"Missy——!"

"Here."

She stepped from the bushes to confront the astounded and discomfited Ike.

"You heard what this man said, Missy?"

"Every word."

"Then the next thing," said the Commander cheerfully, "is to get him to the police station. If he doesn't come along quietly, we'll knock him on the head again."

"Big Ike" reached the police station.

IV

He reached it at the lowest ebb, physically and mentally. Without pressure he confessed, asserting once more that he had thrown the "scale" intending so stun not kill his victim. The superintendent assured Missy that her father would be released as soon as the facts were laid before a justice of the peace. Under the special circumstances he allowed both Roddy and Missy to see Tom Kinsman.

They found him playing patience!

He jumped to his feet when he saw their faces, almost upsetting the table.

"You tell him," said Roddy to Missy.

Before the tale was told Tom Kinsman needed the

pick-me-up which the superintendent provided. The hand that held the glass trembled; the tanned cheeks blanched. Roddy walked to the window and turned his back upon father and daughter. Then he heard the dealer's sharp voice:

"I'm quite all right, Missy. Feel as I did after falling down a gravel pit—dazed, but no bones broken."

Then he gripped Roddy's hand.

"Picked you for a winner, Commander, didn't I?"

"Where should I have been without Missy?"

Both men turned to look at her.

"Where should we all have been without Bert?" asked Missy.

"Bert——?"

"Bert told me at the meet that you had asked him about the Trumans. I knew that you might have to tackle a desperate man on his own ground. I rode towards Shale Park as soon as I saw you were not with hounds. I watched you when you reached the van. I waited till you struck across the moor to walk home. A man slunk after you and I took care that he didn't see me. You were fighting when I reached the scrub. I tip-toed across the moss as that beast was strangling you. I crept up and hit for all I was worth."

Tom said proudly:

"And what is she worth—hay?"

"More than we can give her," replied Roddy promptly.

The superintendent came in.

"I have been on the 'phone," he said, "with the chief constable at Westchester. You will have to remain with me, Mr. Kinsman, till Thursday, the day after to-morrow."

"But the other fellow has confessed."

"Men have confessed to murders which they have not committed. You were remanded to petty sessions. You must appear on Thursday. And on Friday——"

" Yes ? "

" I expect you'll all go a-hunting."

V

When Tom took leave of his visitors, he laid a solemn injunction upon his daughter.

" You take the Commander back to The Yard, and give him a glass of port. Have one yourself. You both need it. Send another bottle round here."

Outside the police station, a constable was holding Missy's horse. The moment was approaching when Roddy and she would be alone together. He glanced up, and her grey eyes fell before that glance.

" Am I to have that port ? " he asked.

His voice was not so steady as hers ; she replied demurely :

" Why, of course."

He walked beside her as far as The Yard in silence. As they approached the gate, Missy said :

" I will tell our boys later."

Nevertheless, when Bert hurried up to take her horse, the expression on his honest face provoked one remark. Probably the whole village was buzzing with anticipation inasmuch as the arrival of Ike at the police station had been witnessed by at least half a dozen curious onlookers.

" I have something to tell you, Bert, but you must wait a little."

" Yes, miss."

The nagsman was trembling with excitement as he led the horse to its box. Missy walked across the yard, followed by Roddy. She went straight to the dining-room. Roddy shut the door. Then he confronted her.

" Missy—— ? "

" Yes ? "

"Your father asked a question just now. What are you worth? I can tell you what you are worth to me—all the world. Don't speak yet! I believe you captured me upon the morning when I pitched end over end into the 'splash.' That was humiliating. But I looked up and saw you, and I felt then that you were different from all the others; I felt that I had found a pal. Ever since, day by day, that conviction has deepened. I want you—desperately. You come first. You saved my life this afternoon, dear Missy, but it won't be worth living without you. Now—come to me!"

He held out his hands. To his consternation, she sank back upon the sofa, covered her face and burst into tears. Roddy rushed at her.

"I have been too abrupt. I ought to have considered what you have been through."

"N—no," she faltered.

He took her hands and held them firmly, but the expression upon her face dismayed him, because he failed to interpret it.

"You don't care?" he whispered. "If that is true, tell me. Be honest with me! Honest——! As if you could be anything else."

She winced, because dissimulation seemed to be forced upon her. Could she rise above the sensibilities of her sex? But he demanded the truth. She recalled her father's quaint exordium: "Keep your stockings well gartered and tell the truth if it doesn't hurt others." This truth would hurt others.

"I do care for you."

"You darling!"

"But I can't marry you."

"Why not?"

She answered valiantly:

"Because of my mother. She wanted to hurt father; she wanted to hurt me. I wonder if she knows how cruelly she has hurt us."

"All that is nothing."

"But it means so much to me. Would your father welcome me as a daughter?"

"I—I don't know, because he doesn't know you. When he does—Missy," he continued in a more assured tone, "if I have to fight for you, I sha'n't slip up as I did to-day. I can earn my living on blue water. I'm not dependent upon anybody—except you. I want you first, last and all the time."

He tried to kiss her; she resisted him.

"You don't care——!"

The passion in his voice overwhelmed her. To his amazement she seemed to surrender unconditionally. Her slender arms gripped him; her soft lips quivered upon his; he could feel her heart throbbing against his chest.

"That is how I care," she said triumphantly.

Suddenly, she slipped from his embrace, jumping to her feet, escaping with extraordinary agility. He saw her facing him with the heavy table between them. She spoke pantingly:

"I had to do it—once."

As she spoke her voice hardened. She became cool and self-possessed, holding up her hand, as she continued:

"I have given myself away. And I am glad—glad. I knew that this was coming. I am proud of loving such a man. But I have thought all this out. I love you too well to marry you. My mother stands between us."

"No."

"Yes."

He contemplated, for an absurd moment, chasing her round the table. A sense of the ridiculous restrained him, and, dominating that again, the stern discipline of the senior service. A sailor does not calm the unruly element by railing at it; he obeys orders; he keeps

his distance. Missy, so to speak, was on her quarter deck, in command. She had thought things out; he hadn't.

"May I have that glass of port?"

He smiled at her. Missy relaxed. She was thinking: "He is a gentleman." She turned to the sideboard. As she did so, a cheer came from the yard.

"They know," said Roddy.

There followed a tramping of feet outside the house, and voices.

"You will have to speak to them," said Roddy.

The maid servant rushed in, breathless.

"You are wanted, miss."

"I'll go with you," said Roddy.

They found The Yard full of people, but the faithful staff were in front, headed by Bert. He shouted at Tom Kinsman's daughter:

"Gawd bless yer, miss."

The cry was taken up behind him, vociferously. It deepened into the roar of an excited crowd, as those in front struggled to shake Missy's hand. Chariabangers from the "Bell" kept on cheering. Outside The Yard, in the usually placid High Street, tradesmen hurried to their doors. Motor horns tooted. Everybody, gentle and simple alike, knew or guessed what had happened. Children came dancing down the road, as the roar increased tremendously in volume. Mary Chaundy was smiting her gong. This inspired a youthful strapper to ring the big bell which hung in The Yard. Never, before or since, had such a demonstration taken place in sleepy Puddenhurst.

"Order! Order!"

"Speech! Speech!"

Those in The Yard stopped shouting and pushing, as Missy mounted a chair provided by the thoughtful Bert. The cheers from the street seemed to provide a diapason accompaniment to her few words.

"My father will thank you on Thursday. I—I didn't know that we had so many friends."

As she stepped from the chair, Roddy leapt on to it. In a voice that could be heard beyond The Yard, he thundered out :

"Mr. Kinsman may hear you, if you'll shout loud enough. Let's sing first !"

He struck up :

"For he's a jolly good fellow——"

The Yard became a howling pandemonium.

VI

Roddy dined that night with "the Bart." and old John. Before he dressed for dinner, he sent a telegram to George Selwin :

Kinsman's innocence established. Can you come here at once ?

Having despatched this message, Roddy's mind dwelt upon a sentence in the letter written by his father to him : "If you marry the right sort of a girl——"

Would Missy be accepted by an ambitious father as the right sort of girl ? What an acid test !

It was heartening to listen to old John after the story of the afternoon was fully told :

"That Kinsman girl is one in ten thousand."

"The Bart." said pleasantly :

"Never lost a bet with so much pleasure in all my life."

Roddy reflected that the hundred pounds represented working capital, if—if he were constrained to fight single-handed for Missy.

Over a cigar and coffee, "the Bart." told another story.

"Di Pundle has accepted me."

Roddy and old John congratulated him cordially. "The Bart.", with some confusion, added a few details.

"She was riding Sammy to-day for the first time. Never saw a girl look better outside a good horse."

Roddy allowed this statement to pass unchallenged. Old John's eyes twinkled, as "the Bart." went on :

"She is never going to ride him again."

"What ? "

"After I popped the question, she owned up. She is a born funkier. She isn't going to hunt after marriage. Well—I laughed. After all, in these beastly times, a man wonders how he's going to mount himself. What's the joke, Selwin ? "

Roddy was laughing uproariously, but he answered the question soberly enough.

"The joke is on me. I came here with the considered intention of riding, if I could, into her heart. I didn't. And you did. All is well."

"All is not well," said "the Bart." uneasily. "The little dear funks telling the Major."

"She can fix the Major," said Roddy.

"How ? "

"Let her make him a present of Sammy."

"The Bart." smote the table and upset his coffee.

"What a brain wave ! Yes ; that's the solution." And it was.

VII

Next morning, Selwin senior replied to Roddy's telegram, saying that he would arrive in Puddenhurst on Friday evening. Meanwhile old John had gone in person to the chairman of the Puddenhurst bench, demanding the release from custody of an innocent man. The chairman consulted the clerk of petty sessions. It was decided that Tom must wait till the Thursday. On Thursday morning, in the presence of a full bench and a crowded court, the dealer became a free man. The gypsy was committed to Westchester gaol, to stand his trial for murder, at the next assizes. Puddenhurst became drunk with enthusiasm. Roddy had to interview several reporters.

Ultimately, he drank his glass of port with Tom, alone in the dining-room. Possibly he took for granted that Missy had spoken to her father. In this he was mistaken.

"I have asked Missy to marry me, Mr. Kinsman."

Tom beamed at him.

"That's a bit of all right. Takes after me, my girl does. Picks a winner."

"A loser."

"Hay?"

"She refuses to marry me."

"What a tale!"

But when the tale was told the little man exhibited both pride and disappointment.

"Nappy! That's what she is—nappy. I'm a bit nappy, too. I owned once the finest jumper in the kingdom. Never won me a prize. For why? I couldn't get her into the ring. No manner of use setting about her; only made her wilder. Same applies to Missy. Is your father a swell?"

"He was the son of a yeoman farmer."

"Was he? My grandfather was a yeoman farmer. Now, Commander, I'll be square with you, straight as a yard of pump water. Mother or no mother my girl is not going to butt in where she isn't wanted. You must have it out with your father."

"I shall," said Roddy.

Tom Kinsman eyed him shrewdly.

"You look as if you generally got what you wanted."

To this Roddy replied modestly:

"It has occurred to me, Mr. Kinsman, that my performances in the hunting field have not quite conveyed that impression to Missy." Was he thinking of "the Bart." as he ended derisively: "I couldn't have proposed to her from the back of a horse."

Tom chuckled.

"I told Bert," he said, "that you could ride the storm better than Timbuctoo. Perhaps you'll ride out this storm ; perhaps you won't. I stand by Missy."

"So do I," declared the Commander.

CHAPTER XV

WHEN GREEK MEETS GREEK

I

SELWIN senior arrived at the "Haunch of Venison" in time for dinner. On his way down he read (for the second time) the morning papers before he tackled the evening press. Pride in the achievements of his son and heir swelled an ample chest. What Roddy had done at Zeebrugge was recapitulated as a fitting parallel to "good hunting" in the Forest of Ys.

Unhappily, George Selwin fell a victim to the preconceived idea. He took for granted that his son had captured a Pundle of Pundle's Green. He had, of course, been summoned to Puddenhurst to make the better acquaintance of a very ancient family. Sir Bernard Burke had plenty to say about the Pundles in his *Landed Gentry*, and mention was made of the "cit's" daughter. Now, history was amiably repeating itself with a difference. Another Diana, accepted as all that a country maiden should be, was taking a husband from the city of London. The affair had civic significance. Under such circumstances, the head of a prosperous firm was prepared to behave handsomely. When he had finished reading the papers, Selwin senior considered what share of his profits might be apportioned to a new junior partner. Under the terms of an agreement of partnership with Bandycutt and Gannaway, the head of the firm was entitled to introduce his son as a partner under the proviso that such apportionment of profits was made. Technically this is called "disposing of goodwill."

Bandycutt and Gannaway would be annoyed, which left Selwin senior comfortably cool. That same morning, after a glance at a picture paper, Bandycutt had called his chief's attention to a portrait of Roddy. It was impossible to look at Roddy's counterfeit presentment without noticing Missy, mounted on Darling, a portrait of maid and mare taken by an enterprising local photographer before the tragedy.

"Handsome girl," said Bandycutt. "Roddy and she hunted together."

Selwin senior ignored this comment, although he chuckled inwardly. Neither Bandycutt nor Gannaway had sought wives whose names were recorded by Sir Bernard Burke. Mrs. Selwin, on the other hand, was the daughter of a parson who claimed kin with a baronet. To hint that this affected a man of sound common sense would be absurd, because Roddy's father had no taint of snobbery in him. It would be as absurd to hide the fact that a successful man of business took pleasure in success. He had soared high above the farm in Dorset. Roddy would soar higher still.

Such thoughts beguiled the journey, and, looking out of window, beholding the trim homesteads of rural England, catching from time to time glimpses of stacked chimneys rising above embosomed trees, it was agreeable to reflect that he might yet aspire to be lord of some ancient manor, which, under existing conditions, could be bought reasonably cheap. Trade was reviving; business had been brisk; securities were rising. . . . Dreams, melting like mists after the war, would after all come true.

II

Roddy met his father at the station and accepted modestly his sire's congratulations. When George Selwin said: "Well, my boy, you have something to

tell me, eh ? ” Roddy replied discreetly : “ Yes, I have, sir, but not in this rattling taxi.”

Father and son dined with “ the Bart.” and old John. The talk was of hunting and the countryside. Designedly, Roddy steered clear of the Kinsmans, although before the fish was served “ the Bart.” mentioned the lost bet.

“ He backed his opinion,” he told George Selwin. “ And got a cool hundred out of me. No complaints.”

“ We’ve all had enough of this beastly murder,” said Roddy.

It was nearly ten when the Selwins were alone together in a small private sitting-room, and by that time the father was betraying impatience.

“ Now for it,” he remarked ; “ you didn’t wire for me, my boy, to give me a dinner not so good as I get at home.”

“ No.”

“ The young lady has said ‘ yes,’ eh ? ”

“ Not yet.”

“ But she will ? ”

“ That depends, sir, upon you.”

George Selwin chuckled, as the preconceived idea once more obsessed him. He had a vision of his son approaching Major Pundle in the good old-fashioned style and demanding his daughter’s hand. A Pundle of Pundle’s Green would reply : “ Your father and I must talk this over.”

“ I take you, Roddy. I’m not surprised, or displeased. The young lady’s father, of course, wants to meet me. I have come down fully prepared to meet him. I smell lavender already and orange blossoms.”

Roddy smelt The Yard. And that pungent odour put to flight half a dozen rehearsed sentences. Older and more experienced men found it difficult to be diplomatic with George Selwin. He could “ cut cackle ” as quickly as Tom Kinsman.

Roddy said abruptly :

" Miss Diana Pundle is engaged to be married to Sir Montagu Brambleby. I have fallen in love with somebody else."

The father gasped ; Roddy, remarking deflation, blurted out the whole truth : " I want to marry Tom Kinsman's daughter, who saved my life."

Selwin senior gripped the arms of his chair. The small room was none too well lighted. Out of the shadows in the corners the malicious faces of Bandycutt and Gannaway leered and gibbered.

" You want to marry a horse dealer's daughter ? "

" Yes."

The father threw away a good cigar and sat bolt upright in his chair. Bandycutt and Gannaway vanished. He was staring at a son whom he found difficulty in recognizing, although that son at the moment was startlingly like himself. Each protruded determined jaws ; each was flushed and, shall we add, flustered.

" Do you expect a blessing and a settlement from me ? " growled George Selwin.

" Not yet. I want you to meet Miss Kinsman ; I want you to form an unbiased opinion of her. Also, sir, I would remind you that she refuses to marry me."

" Why ? "

" Because she realizes how you feel, because in her way she is as proud as you are, and as fond of her father as I am of mine."

George Selwin glanced at the cigar he had thrown away and lit another. It was comforting to reflect that this girl had refused his son, comforting and at the same time disquieting. Refusals whetted ardours in Selwins.

Presently he said quietly :

" This is a bad business, my boy. It distresses me. The girl's mother——!"

" I know."

"But—do you?"

"Mrs. Kinsman came of yeoman stock, much the same as ours. Her brother, so Tom Kinsman told me, is a good fellow and straight. If I were wanting to marry the daughter of a duke, whose duchess had bolted with some handsome rascal, would you refuse your consent?"

"I might," said George Selwin simply; and he meant it.

III

He smoked on, thinking hard, curbing any inclination to speak harshly. In the end he decided that this was an infatuation which would pass. Roddy's mother and sisters pronounced the boy "impressionable." Within three weeks he had swapped sweethearts in mid Forest. When Roddy got back to Capel Court he would forget the horse dealer's daughter.

But, indisputably, she had saved the boy's life.

Coming down in the train, he had wondered how best he could indicate a sense of gratitude. He intended to thank her in simple words which were at his command. Later on, with no indecent suggestion of cancelling a great obligation, it would be a pleasure to send her a set of furs. Then he had dismissed Missy from his thoughts.

Roddy smoked his pipe, respecting his father's silence and thinking ruefully that he had not displayed the arts of the accomplished advocate. "I landed too heavily," he said to himself; and then, wonderingly: "Could I have let him down more easily?"

George Selwin answered that question:

"You have put me in a hole, Roddy. I was expecting something else. It's not easy to look at this with any sort of detachment. The girl saved your life. That constitutes a tremendous claim on both of us. I don't minimize that claim. But marriage——?"

He sighed. Then he stood up, solidly erect.

"I'm feeling tired. I shall go to bed. I ask you to believe that your happiness is of immense concern to me and your mother, but I make no promises."

He held out his hand.

IV

Roddy accompanied his father to his bedroom and returned to the small parlour. It was certain that George Selwin would act according to his lights. It was as certain that he would oppose any marriage which he chose to regard as imperilling his son's happiness. He would not lose his temper; he would disdain threats pat to the lips of Roman fathers.

"I'm up against it," thought Roddy. "What a rare old boy it is!"

To his dismay, "the Bart." burst into the room, ordered whiskies and sodas, and held forth for a full hour on the virtues and graces of the future Lady Brambleby. Independence babbled on to dependence, increasing the prodigious distance between the two states. It was amazing to reflect that England held thousands of such men, who sincerely believed that the world owed them something for nothing. "The Bart." snarled at taxation upon money that he had not earned. He demanded, as a divine right, horses to ride, pheasants to shoot, the best of food and drink and a charming wife. After dwelling garrulously upon all these good things, he ended upon a melancholy note:

"I shall have to cut down ex's a bit, what?"

"Your charities?" suggested Roddy.

"The Bart." brightened.

"I hadn't thought of them. Charity does begin at home, doesn't it?"

"So I have heard," replied Roddy drily.

"The Bart." went on, an unconscious humorist.

"Country bird, the Lord be praised! And keen on

gardenin'. I shall give her a hundred to spend on bulbs, and then there won't be expensive larkings up to London, hay? "

"Very sound," said Roddy.

"The Bart." retired to bed to dream, perchance, of a dear little woman who would be satisfied with an Englishman's home as it ought to be in the eyes of a sportsman. Roddy went to his bed, also, to lie awake.

If his father refused to accept Missy as the right sort——?

He was prepared, so he had said, to fight for her. He might have to take to blue water again. Such a prospect presented exhilarations. But he was thinking of Missy left alone. He recalled the old saying accredited to the wife of some mariner: "Don't marry a sailor—if you love him, he's always afloat, if you hate him, he's always ashore."

On his own, independent of a generous sire, what had he to offer Missy?

V

Next morning, at his father's wish, Roddy went hunting. George Selwin told part of the truth to his son when he said: "I wish to be alone, my boy. I must be back at the office on Monday."

"I understand," Roddy answered. He added nervously: "Hounds are meeting close to Puddenhurst. If you care to appear at the meet, I'll introduce you to Missy."

"Certainly.

From the genial countenance which smiled at him across the breakfast table, a sailor, weather-wise in most matters, could take no reckonings. After breakfast, father and son walked about Puddenhurst, and the Kinsmans were not mentioned. The men had time to wander into the Forest, passing, as they did so, The Yard. Selwin senior noted the sign. He may have

noted, also, the general appearance of neatness and prosperity which characterized everything within the big white gates. He asked one question :

" Will Kinsman be out hunting ? "

" No ; Saturday is the busy day with him."

George Selwin nodded.

They sauntered across the golf course and into the Forest. At eleven Roddy returned to the hotel to put on his hunting kit. After breakfast he had rung up Bert on the 'phone. The reliable Rescue was carrying a lady. Bert suggested Timbuctoo as a substitute, adding thoughtfully : " The old horse had a short day yesterday ; he'll carry you quietly to-day." Finally it was arranged that Timbuctoo should be at the meet.

As Roddy pulled on his boots, he reflected that Missy would be seen by his father at her best—outside a good horse. And this came to pass. She was riding the chestnut of which mention has been made.

Roddy approached her afoot.

" This is my father."

Pride informed his voice.

George Selwin offered his hand as he said :

" The boy's mother and I realize how much we owe to you, my dear."

Missy replied promptly :

" My father and I hardly realize yet, Mr. Selwin, what we owe to your son."

" Quick-witted," thought George Selwin.

He glanced at Roddy, who walked off to mount Timbuctoo. The chestnut figetted, but Missy's hands controlled him.

" You are an accomplished horsewoman."

" It's my business."

" And your pleasure ? "

" I love horses, Mr. Selwin."

" Have you made a horseman out of my boy ? "

She laughed for the first time.

"That can't be done in three weeks, can it?"

He agreed gravely. The girl's self-possession disconcerted him, because he believed with good reason that he could "size up" men and women swiftly, particularly those with whom he might have business relations. When he woke that morning, he had repeated: "This is a bad business." Still a victim to the preconceived idea, he made sure that there must be in this dealer's daughter some taint of the smirking provincial beauty. It was upsetting to find dignity where he had expected wiles.

"Are you following hounds to-day?"

"Yes."

Not twenty yards distant, "the Bart." was talking to a young lady with much animation.

"Is that Miss Diana Pundle?" asked Selwin.

It was, so Missy informed him. Selwin lifted his hat and strolled away. He wanted to inspect more closely the peri whom he would have welcomed so warmly into the paradise of his dream.

"A dear little thing," he muttered to himself.

It was impossible to say much more about Di. And from the point of view of a masterful man dear little things are attractive. Di was smiling sweetly at Sir Montagu Brambleby; a warmer damask tinted her cheeks, because many eyes were turned towards her. Puddenhurst had heard of the engagement. Missy, too, challenged public attention, but she seemed regardless of it; her cheeks were a thought paler. George Selwin's courtesy was not encouraging. Roddy's father could not be discourteous, she reflected. But he had surveyed her critically—and coldly. And he looked a "diehard" of the old school.

Restlessness of mind communicated itself to her horse. The chestnut displayed impatience. Missy spoke to him and cantered away.

VI

As hounds trotted off, George Selwin made up his mind to see Tom Kinsman. A talk between two sensible men would clear the air. Walking briskly over soft turf, he was aware that spring, somewhat belated, had come to Puddenhurst. He noted swallows. A brimstone butterfly fluttered above the gorse. The larches were palely green against the dark firs. Catkins tasselled the willows. A man born and bred in the country wandered back to the days of his boyhood, the days of fresh air and plenty of manual exercise. He glanced at powerful hands that had gripped the plough handle. At the Meet he had wondered if he could take to the saddle again—upon the back of a reliable cob.

He thirsted for a long satisfying draught of cool cyder. . . .

VII

Tom, an hour later, was inspecting a horse brought to him by a local farmer. The dealer had returned to his business with an amazing zest for details connected with it. His reception by the staff and the villagers had quickened all activities.

The farmer was shrewd enough not to overpraise a nag upon which he had set a reasonable price.

"A nice little 'orse, Mr. Kinsman. Good shoulder! A bit slack in the loin; could do with another rib. I bred 'un."

"'Course you did," said Tom. "You can't think I thought you *bought* him."

"You allers likes your joke."

Tom grinned at him.

"Ever been in the lock-up?"

"Not yet."

"It's a rare joke getting out of it—makes a fellow feel good and good natured, too. I'll take this horse, because I can afford to keep him and you can't."

"Times are rotten again wi' us, Mr. Kinsman."

"We have to stand in together," said Tom genially. He lowered his voice. "A gentleman over there wants to speak to me. Come back presently."

The farmer nodded and moved off as Tom approached George Selwin. The farmer happened to be slightly deaf; Tom had shouted at him. It would be unkind to hint that the dealer wished to advertise what he admitted to Missy to be the softer spots in an otherwise indurated heart, but he was no "humble Allen."

"My name is Selwin, Mr. Kinsman."

Tom had guessed as much. He gripped the extended hand.

"That son of yours, sir, snatched a halter from my neck. I'm short in the wind at the thought of it." He put his hand to his throat and winked. George Selwin laughed; the wink was irresistible.

"You'll step into my house, won't you? We must drink the Commander's health."

"Certainly."

Selwin, however, stood still and gazed about him. The Yard pleased him. He said pleasantly:

"You have a snug crib here."

"Paid for, too," said Tom complacently. "Had to work for it, sweated blood for it, watched the business grow."

"I know—I know."

Tom warmed up.

"Talk o' prosperity—we can all do with a slice o' that, but what ties a man tight to his job is gettin' over bad times."

Selwin nodded.

"Making good, Mr. Kinsman."

"Make good and you feel good."

"Yes; I overheard you say something like that just now."

"Ah—h! The cracklin' of a fire and the cracklin'

on a loin o' pork hit the top of the market after cold and hunger. This way, sir."

They walked together into the dining-room. George Selwin sat down in a big armchair. Tom pulled out of the sideboard his best cut glass decanter.

"It's the right stuff," he remarked.

They sipped their wine in silence. Presently Selwin said abruptly :

"I had the pleasure of meeting your daughter this morning."

He had intended to speak formally, but Tom's face disarmed him. Obviously the dealer regarded his daughter as his greatest possession. He beamed at another father, who had good reason to be proud of his son. Upon this common ground the men met as equals.

"Best little girl in the world, Mr. Selwin." Without waiting for comment, he continued with quaint vehemence :

"Have I made a mistake ? "

"A mistake ? About what ? "

"In giving her the education of a lady. She's been schooled properly, no blundering at fences. You've come down here, Mr. Selwin, to look at her and to look at me. I know that. Vet both of us. Take your time about it. You've made plans for your boy ; I've made plans for my girl. I'd like to say a word to you about her poor mother."

"I shall respect such a confidence."

"She was a pretty country girl, of good stock. Hindsight is a damned sight longer than foresight. Looking back I know what was wrong with her ; lack of schooling. I don't mean what can be learnt out of books. Her father made a pet of her. If you want to ruin a horse make a pet of him. I had a colt once who followed me about like a dog and did tricks, circus tricks. I was fool enough to teach him to stand on

his hind legs and beg for a bit of sugar. I taught him to rear. One day, he fell back on me and smashed three ribs. *See?* Well, I married the family pet. Maybe I was too tied up with business. I worked like a black for her. But I had to travel up and down the country looking for horses. I hadn't time to give her sugar. She got that from another fellow, a dirty dog. She went back on me, and the other fellow went back on her. It nearly smashed me; it did smash her."

"Inevitable!"

"When she left me, I swore that Missy should not pay for the sins and shortcomings of others. I didn't spoil her. She pulled her weight in my boat before she scaled six stun! I sent her to a tip-top school. In the holidays, she worked under me in The Yard—and loved it. But the stream has risen higher than its source. I've trained her to trot out of my class. And now——"

"And now?"

"And now," his voice broke, "I may have made her miserably unhappy."

"I hope not, Mr. Kinsman. Perhaps I appreciate your position the more because I gave my boy advantages which were not given to me. I had to fight for my own hand as you did."

"But it comes to this, doesn't it? My daughter is not quite good enough for your son?"

"I don't put it that way."

"The Commander's father couldn't. You see big obstacles; so do I. If we've pluck enough to leap 'em, we're old enough to look first. I have my share of pride, Mr. Selwin. My daughter won't be encouraged by me to butt in where she isn't welcome. She has refused your son."

"So he told me."

"And I told him that I stood by Missy, rain or

shine. And so I do. All the same we two old 'uns are up against it."

"Against what?"

"Youth. Like clings to like. Pride goes before a fall. Full of old tags, I am; and I learned about men from horses. Missy is nappy at the moment. I never set about a nappy horse; that drives 'em wild. I coax 'em. Your son may coax my girl whatever we think about it."

What George Selwin was thinking—and he lay at the mercy of a dozen conflicting interests—will never be known. Bert routed thought. The nagsman was ushered into the dining-room by the servant maid.

"What is it?" asked Tom.

"Nothing, I hopes," replied Bert, "but Timbuctoo 'as come back to The Yard without his rider."

"Oh Lord!" groaned Tom. He turned to Selwin: "Your son was riding Timbuctoo this morning. As—as Bert says, it may mean nothing. The old horse is too clever to be caught. If he got away, he would leg it for stables."

"Shall I saddle your cob, sir?"

Tom shook his head.

"I'll take the car."

"I will go with you," said Roddy's father.

CHAPTER XVI

TIMBUCTOO'S HUNT

I

RODDY, when he mounted Timbuctoo, was agreeably sensible of a firmer grip of the pigskin. The necessity of hanging on by the reins, whilst knees slipped farther back on slippery flaps, was not so insistant. And the old horse, somehow, seemed to acknowledge the progress of a novice. He arched his neck and cocked his small ears, as Roddy returned the greetings of many friends.

An immense crowd had assembled. Chars-à-bancs from Westhampton and Cronmouth, motors of all sizes and descriptions, pony carts, bicycles and foot passengers encompassed a big field of horsemen. The master said ruefully to the honorary secretary :

"One man can hunt these hounds, but it takes a dozen to curse the field."

The honorary secretary smiled, thinking of his subscription list and the undiminished popularity of fox hunting.

Old John, on a noble bay, held forth to Roddy upon the same entrancing theme. A lover was wondering what his father might be thinking of Missy; his subconscious mind composed scraps of dialogue; but he could hear old John :

"We hunt now on sufferance. I'm glad to see all these people even at the risk that our fox may be headed."

The Major, chairman of the poultry fund, agreed mournfully.

"Hard to satisfy the claims sent in," he growled.

"The other day I got a letter from a woman. . . . No names."

"No names," repeated old John firmly.

"She asked for a big cheque because a fox had bitten off the heads of a dozen prize Wyandottes."

"Dear! Dear! What did you do?"

"I put it across her," replied the Major. "I told her that there were three good reasons for not satisfying her claim: (1) she happened to be a member of the hunt; (2) she is a rich woman; (3) there is no money in our poultry fund."

Old John chuckled. The Major went on, very solemnly:

"Another neighbour of mine wrote to me complaining that three of his cows had eaten yew and died, because the gate of some field was left open. I looked the matter up quietly. The damned liar hadn't lost a cow! He wanted to make trouble, a cantankerous, crib-biting cad. I put it across him."

"How?" asked Roddy.

"I offered to pay for the cows that had not died. That downed him. He wrote back: 'You are the only gentleman left in the Forest and I shall stand all losses myself.'"

Old John chuckled again, as hounds trotted off.

Timbuctoo kept near them. Roddy shogged on behind in illustrious company, as self-conscious as if he were wearing a red coat for the first time. Would he ever don pink? More unlikely things had happened. He wanted to be with Missy, but he dared not discuss the matter with Timbuctoo. As he mounted that masterful animal, Bert had said: "You can ram him at anything you like, sir." Secretly, Roddy hoped that there would be nothing to ram him at.

They came to Batley Bog, a sure find early in the season, and just the place, in late April, where a

travelling dog fox might cool himself off in the middle of the day. Old John hated the country round Batley Bog because he was unfamiliar with the crossings. He said to the Major :

“ Which side of the bog shall we go ? ”

“ Right,” replied the Petronius of the Forest of Ys, with authority. He added positively : “ Foxes break away from here, nine times out of ten, right-handed. But you can stand near the bridge, if you like.”

Master and hunt servants went right-handed. The field followed at a discreet distance. Roddy, restraining the ardours of Timbuctoo, lagged behind, looking for Missy. To his surprise he saw her going left. Nobody followed her, assuming, possibly, that she meant to go home. The chestnut she was riding was on his toes. Roddy hoped that she wanted to steer a very fractious steed out of a big crowd. At the back of his mind rankled the conviction that Missy wished to keep away from himself. He turned Timbuctoo's lean head to the left. Half humorously, he thought : “ The old horse is in command. I shall leave important decisions to him.”

Timbuctoo, for reasons best known to himself, decided to join the chestnut, now two hundred yards ahead of him. Missy was standing still, watching hounds. They were drawing the bog beautifully, taking that particular interest in the job which warranted the supposition that scent was good.

Missy looked cool and imperturbable, as she invariably did when in the saddle. Roddy dared even to believe that she had withdrawn from the crowd in the hope that a lover would follow her. She said quietly :

“ If the fox breaks away this side, we shall have a wonderful start.”

“ That doesn't seem to have occurred to anyone else except you.”

"As a rule Batley foxes make for the Forest, where earths are open. Hounds are working up to something."

She pointed with her whip. A whimper floated to them from the middle of the bog, a challenge from a reliable hound.

"Hoick to Gadabout! Hoick to Gadabout!"

A swelling chorus from the pack.

"There he goes," said Missy.

A big dog fox crept out of the bog, crossing the thick heather just in front of the lucky pair.

"He means business," said Missy. "Don't move till hounds are out of the bog. Can you holloa him away?"

"No."

Missy put her hand to her ear, and a high clear note, thrillingly piercing, set Timbuctoo a-dancing. Roddy watched its effect on the Master. He pulled up, hesitating. A choice of two evils presented itself. He could gallop on to the further crossing or gallop back to the bridge. He galloped on, followed by the field.

"We have ten minutes start," said Missy. "Hounds are racing—a screaming scent."

"I shall try to follow you," murmured Roddy.

As the last hound left the bog, Missy gave the chestnut his head. He shot down one ride and up another. Timbuctoo reached at his bridle. He was gentleman enough to give a lady room. The trees of Batley Wood flashed by; deep ruts invited disaster. Missy looked back.

"Ware rabbit holes," she shouted.

Roddy, unwittingly quoting Jorrocks, muttered to himself: "This is an unmanageable bit of country."

They came out of the wood. Missy was galloping well to the left of hounds. The chestnut took the long downward slope of the hill with the stride of a thoroughbred. Timbuctoo sped after him. Roddy gripped the saddle and prayed that he mightn't override hounds.

Ahead lay Ashley Wood on rising ground. Below the trees a silvery streak indicated water, possibly bog. Suddenly hounds swung right-handed, a turn that brought Roddy nearer to them than Missy. Presently, as she overhauled him, he could hear her voice :

“ We shall have this to ourselves.”

“ You go first.”

Timbuctoo struggled for pride of place, but the chestnut was faster and carrying a much lighter weight. Both horses flew the water together. In less than a minute they were crashing through Ashley Wood. Roddy never knew how he got through that wood. His hat was irreparably ruined. He grazed the trunks of gnarled oaks ; he was scourged by holly bushes ; but he stuck to Missy. A curious conviction assailed him. She was escaping him, flitting from him for ever and ever. . . .

II

Hounds checked for a moment as they overran the Puddenhurst road. The horses stopped.

“ You’re a marvel ! ”

“ Shush—h—h ! ”

She held up her hand. Hounds were casting themselves, noses close to the ground. One indiscreet word and up go their heads.

“ They have it.”

An old hound hit the line. As he did so, a distant holloa from Puddenhurst station was heard. Missy once more restrained a too eager novice.

“ Let them follow the line. It’s quicker in the end with such a scent as this.”

Obviously the fox had been headed. Missy and Roddy trotted up the road, with hounds running to the right, till the station was in sight. Half a dozen persons informed them that the fox had crossed the highway.

"He's in Letchwood," said Missy. "I know the way."

Hounds raced into Letchwood, as Missy galloped down a lane parallel with the wood. At the end of the cover Roddy saw grass fields, fences—a flying country. Hounds streamed across a forty acre field.

The chestnut sailed over the first fence. Timbuctoo followed. Roddy was shot into the air, landed upon a thick neck and slid gratefully back into the saddle. Missy steadied the chestnut.

"Is there wire?" asked Roddy.

"I don't know."

She pressed on. At the next fence, Timbuctoo, on his own initiative, picked the easiest place, collected himself as he approached it, and took off in the right spot. Roddy gripped the pummel.

"This is splendid," he thought. "This is a hunt."

Being perfectly honest, he added:

"But it's putting the wind up me."

The wind was not tempered by the sight of a stiffish post and rails. Timbuctoo negotiated them cleverly, remembering possibly an imperial crowner at a similar obstacle. Horses hate falling quite as much as their riders. Missy eased the chestnut over some marshy meadow land. Once more Roddy was within speaking distance.

"Go slow at that bank."

Missy knew the bank. As a child she had picked daffodils in this field. She had scrambled afoot over the bank. Was the chestnut a banker? He had been trained in a flying country. Would he crawl?

The chestnut behaved charmingly, acknowledging perfect hands. He trotted up to the big bank, hopped on to it, and launched himself over the far ditch. Missy looked back to watch Roddy's performance. Let us

say, charitably, that he did his best, but he lost both stirrups! Timbuctoo pecked a bit on landing. Fine sloping shoulders saved a fall.

Forrard! Forrard!

Hounds were now turning left-handed, approaching some cottages and small holdings. Missy remembered a road. The fox's point, evidently, was a cover crowning a hill some two miles away; there he would find big badgers' earths and safe harbourage. The fences near the small holdings were probably wired.

Missy wondered whether she ought to stick to the road. She and Roddy could reach the hill before hounds.

She pulled up in the road, faintly smiling, sensible that an ardent lover intended to follow her anywhere—everywhere. Deliberately she had slipped aside to the left of the bog to escape from him. Talking to George Selwin, she had felt chilled. A courtesy too studied betrayed a father's thoughts. In his eyes she must be the daughter of a wanton.

And yet, Roddy followed her.

Pulses quickened, fibres throbbed because of that.

Timbuctoo saw the chestnut standing in the road. He could see hounds streaming across the field beyond. He could hear the intoxicating cry, the rejuvenating music. For this he had been born and bred. What are the thoughts that ravage a noble hunter degenerating into an aged hireling? Horses never forget, however philosophically they may accept indignities. Timbuctoo had hammered over too many roads. They hurt his hocks and forelegs; they bruised his feelings.

He hopped over a small fence into the road, and carried the impotent Roddy into the next field, leaving Missy gaping. . . .

III

Hounds swung to the left of the cottages, breasting a slope and across a holding bit of plough where men

were at work. As Roddy passed them, they yelled out :
" Fox just ahead."

Roddy galloped through an open gate into a small field with a ragged fence round it. As he did so, hounds threw up in the field beyond, where the surface was rank with some strong artificial fertilizer, anathema to delicate nostrils. Timbuctoo stopped to watch them.

Missy joined him. Her experienced eye took in the situation at a glance. Three strands of barbed wire ran through the ragged fence. As she trotted round the field looking for a possible place, the owner of the field appeared at the gate. Grinning maliciously, he slipped a chain round the gate.

Missy approached the farmer and smiled at him. Her smile brought back to Roddy's mind what old John had observed about hunting existing on sufferance ; it checked the choleric word ; it revealed illuminatingly the funny side.

" We are your prisoners of war," said Roddy.

The farmer blinked ; and then, having nothing pat to his lip, nodded.

" Are you prepared," asked Roddy, " to board and lodge us ? "

" And our horses," added Missy. " You couldn't let them starve, could you ? "

The farmer winced. Sons of the soil are not impervious to ridicule.

" You can't ' flimflam ' me," he declared.

" Of course not," murmured Missy. " Let us out—please."

She cooed at him, still smiling.

" I've warned 'ee time an' time agen. I won't have they hounds on my land. Master knows that."

" But hounds don't. Come—let us out."

" Not yet awhile. You jump my wire if ye've stummick for 'un."

" There is a place," said Missy to Roddy as the farmer

turned a broad back on them. She pointed with her whip at a spot where the fence was thick about the wire, but a horse would have to jump between two trees and under an awkward overhanging bough.

"A beast of a place," growled Roddy. He added, in a different tone: "We *are* prisoners. We must make the best of things. We can eat our sandwiches together."

As he spoke hounds owned to scent at the lower end of the next field. A sinking fox had crawled down a ditch hoping to find a drain at the end of it. The pack raced on in full cry. Missy knew that she was alone with her lover. Because she had surrendered once, he would expect her to surrender again.

If she did——?

Instinctively, blind to every consideration except the desire to fly not from his strength but from her own weakness, she put her horse at the fence. He leapt it easily.

Roddy was not so fortunate. Timbuctoo jumped big. To avoid the overhanging bough Roddy bent low and forward. As Timbuctoo landed, his rider was shot over his head, landing upon the point of the shoulder. Timbuctoo galloped after the hounds.

Missy slipped out of the saddle.

IV

It transpired afterwards that a stout fox made his point and went to ground in a deep, undiggable earth. Half a dozen people beheld a pack of hounds and a riderless horse in the middle of them. They attempted to capture the horse without success. Timbuctoo returned in triumph to The Yard. Master, hunt servants and the field appeared later. Nobody had seen either Roddy or Missy.

No great damage was done, but Missy didn't know this at first. Roddy lay where he fell. Missy fell

where he lay. The recalcitrant farmer, peering over a fence, saw a young woman on her knees beside a young man. This affected him, inasmuch as he accepted personal responsibility. But he grinned as Roddy rose to his feet, because the young woman flung her arms about her companion and embraced him unreservedly.

The farmer approached them.

"I says this——" he began.

The blushing Missy turned to confront him.

"I says that you two can ride over my land whenever you've a mind to; and I hopes wi' all my heart you ain't the worse, sir."..

"I feel fine," declared Roddy.

All the same he had broken his collar bone.

The farmer insisted upon taking charge of the chestnut. Roddy and Missy found themselves in a parlour.

"You see you can't get away from me," said Roddy.

"I—I tried."

"You did. But nothing on this jolly old earth is going to keep you from me, unless——"

"Unless——?"

"Do you funk the possibility of being a sailor's wife?"

"Did you funk those fences to-day?"

"I did and I didn't. In cold blood, you know—I——" He broke off abruptly, capturing her hand, as he whispered: "But my blood isn't cold, and you were on the farther side of the fences. If we have to do it, let's hunt fortune together, Missy."

Her lips failed to frame a protest because they were otherwise engaged.

V

We return to The Yard.

Hitherto, the remote possibility of losing a son who had survived the Great War had never occurred to George Selwin. Now it sat behind him, black as Care, as he took the road with Tom Kinsman. Being an

optimist he hoped for the best, but he couldn't ignore the worst. Tom said sympathetically :

" You're thinking of your boy ; I'm thinking of my girl."

" But she hasn't taken a toss."

" Perhaps she has," growled Tom. " Looks to me as if she'd taken the toss of her life if anything is really wrong with the Commander."

George Selwin digested this in moody silence. Here chance, so he reflected, had bludgeoned him and his ambitions. Under the circumstances it became impossible to cherish kindly feelings towards the Kinsmans. If Kinsman had not let out hunters——

" If——? "

The ridiculous, diminutive word exasperated him.

If Roddy had been killed in the War ? He recalled the case of a young fellow who had passed unscathed through fifty actions returning home on leave to be wiped out by 'flu.

The car buzzed down the Puddenhurst-Westhampton road. A strapper who had led horses to the meet told Tom that hounds were seen running towards Ashley Wood and that two followers were alone with them. At Puddenhurst station more information was forthcoming. Hounds had run through Letchwood.

Later on, they met returning sportsmen who told the tale of a pack marking a fox to ground with a riderless horse amongst them. Finally, after many twistings and turnings the farmer's house was reached, and the farmer himself allayed increasing anxieties. He had cows to be milked, but his wife had driven the young gentleman back to Puddenhurst. Missy had mounted the chestnut.

" You ought to have met 'em."

The farmer pressed upon his visitors old ale which he could recommend. The two fathers drank the ale,

pre-war Burton, Number One; they harked to a garrulous tongue:

"Scared to death I was! Never thought they'd have a go at my wire. Meant to let 'em out, I did. Honest—I thought he'd broken his neck. *So did she!*"

Tom put his hand to his own collar, thinking of his own neck. The farmer went on cheerily:

"Next thing I saw **they** was a-hugging a fair treat."

"Gosh!" exclaimed Tom.

"Um!" murmured Mr. Selwin.

"Did the subject justice," continued the farmer, smacking his lips. Then he added solemnly: "I told my old missis that I'd done my best to tear 'em asunder, but God brought 'em together—a very peart, notable pair. Here's health and happiness to both of 'em!"

He raised his glass. The fathers hesitated, glancing at each other. George Selwin said drily:

"We can drink that toast."

They did so—perfunctorily.

VI

The car had been left in the lane leading to the farmhouse. As they approached it, George Selwin said carelessly:

"I'll light a pipe. What a quiet, peaceful place this is!"

Tom nodded, fishing a pipe out of his own pocket. He was thinking that wishing health and happiness to two young people was one thing, whereas working to bring about the same result was another. The same thought, evidently, was percolating through George Selwin's mind, for he observed quietly:

"Our hands were forced a bit just now."

"Yes."

The pride that Tom had in Missy and himself gripped him as Selwin went on:

"My boy told me that your daughter had refused to marry him, but this fresh evidence——"

It was impossible to resent Selwin's tone of voice. He seemed, indeed, to be stating the case against himself without rancour, but a quick-witted man divined opposition and obstinacy. Tom said hastily:

"Do you think you can prevent your boy marrying my girl?"

"I don't know, Mr. Kinsman."

Tom laughed. It was an ugly, raucous laugh, and for this reason. Till this moment, ever since Em'ly had left him, the dealer had dealt tenderly and honestly with his daughter. He had sworn to "make the best of her." Without being unduly sententious, it is a fact not sufficiently recognized as such that making the best of others nourishes and expands what is best in us. Curses may have followed Em'ly and her bagman; blessings hovered about a tiny cot. Of the curses that followed Em'ly, one now returned to roost in Tom's distressed heart. Obviously Roddy's father meant to try to "rend asunder" the lovers. With any backing from Missy's father he might succeed. Tom had a vision of The Yard without Missy. He was tempted sorely to fight against her happiness because he was damnably afraid of losing his own. Missy had inherited his pride. If he played skilfully enough on that, she might send Roddy packing. In that event an ambitious stockbroker might lose a son, but a humble horse-dealer would not lose a daughter. As a shrewd bargainer this "heads I win, tails you lose" proposition appealed to Tom Kinsman at the expense of course, of Missy.

"You mean to try," he said viciously.

They were sitting, smoking, on a bank near the car. Selwin's face remained placid till he noted the expression on Tom's face which was startlingly aggressive. Tom, he decided, was glaring at him.

"I shall try," Mr. Selwin paused for the fraction of a second, "to do what I deem my duty."

The dealer, shaken to his centre, replied violently and scornfully. He could not indict Selwin's sincerity, because he was so doubtful about his own.

"Duty? Duty takes a bit of doing when it clashes with interests. I'd like to do my duty by Missy. You don't know what the child means to me. Saved me from committing murder she did."

"The other day?"

"Fifteen years ago. I can't guess what your son means to you. You have a wife and other children. I have nobody except Missy. She's—everything to me. You'd made your plans; I made mine. I hoped that Missy would cotton to some young fellow who'd join me in a good business. Instead, she cottoned to your son. She may marry him whatever we say to the contrary. If she does, she goes off with him to share his life which isn't my life. You and I can work together against the true happiness of our own flesh and blood, and if we win through I shan't lose Missy, but you may lose the Commander. I want to keep Missy, and, by God! because I want to keep her I'm ashamed of myself. I could have killed her mother with an easier conscience than I have at this minute."

Selwin was tremendously impressed. The speaker, so he reflected, might be begging the whole question. This love affair might or not be seriously involving the health and happiness of the protagonists. But he recognized in Tom a passionate feeling and a candour in expressing it to which he lifted his hat. Tom, for the moment, appeared to be hating and despising him. But the appeal was irresistible.

"We musn't," he said slowly, "work against their happiness either together or apart. Perhaps I do not altogether know my son. Certainly I don't know your daughter. Marking time would appear to be indicated."

"I've a quick temper, Mr. Selwin. You must form your own opinion of Missy. But I tried to train her to pick a winner, because I picked a loser. See? And it's been rubbed well into me that we owe our children more than they owe us."

"You go as far as that?"

George Selwin took his pipe from his mouth and pushed back his hat. Missy's father was arresting his undivided attention. Perhaps he had just discovered in him—quality. Tom, carried away on the flood tide of emotion, spoke hoarsely, not picking his words:

"Yes; I go as far and farther than that. A man ought to be more careful than I was when it comes to walking out with a young woman. But I wasn't thinking of Missy then. I fell in love with a pretty doll. Likely as not she supposed that I could give her what she wanted. I didn't. So she legged it. I'll say this for her—she was healthy enough. Missy's mother was sound in her body. Missy has never been sick or sorry. Comes back to her corn after a hard day's work and eats it up. Sound in body and in mind. Didn't get her good brains from her mother."

Selwin smiled. He was beginning to see Missy in a clearer light. He admitted (to himself) that she had chosen wisely her father. Nevertheless he clung to the unconsidered opinion that this love affair must be an infatuation upon Roddy's part, something ephemeral. He had "rushed" things. He was still smiling, as he murmured:

"We can test these young people."

"Hay?"

"I admit, with reasonable reservations, that we fathers do owe our children more than they owe us. And whether we admit that or not, youth will be served. This accident broke my boy's collar bone and your girl's pride."

"Looks like it, I must say."

"The farmer used the word 'hugging.'"

"I'll stake my life he's the first young man she's hugged."

"You are sure of that?"

"Dead sure."

"That counts with me," admitted Selwin, pensively.

"I suggest, Mr. Kinsman, that we do attempt to work together to secure their happiness. I should be more inclined to give my consent to their marriage if it was quite certain that they fully intended to marry without it."

Tom had startled him; now, in his turn, he startled and confounded Tom. Humour, possibly, is potent to exercise devils. Certainly Selwin's words exercised the spirit of selfishness in temporary possession of the dealer's honest heart.

"Gosh!"

"It's a new point of view, isn't it? Is this love strong enough to surmount obstacles?"

Tom chuckled.

"Let's hop into the car," he suggested.

CHAPTER XVII

WHOOO—HOOP !

I

WHEN the partners pledged to secure the happiness of their children reached The Yard, Bert received them. From him they learned that Roddy was at the " Haunch of Venison " and Missy in her father's house. Timbuctoo was crunching his corn as if nothing had occurred.

Missy received the partners in the parlour.

She had prinked—— !

George Selwin beheld her for the first time in the garments of the modern Eve, which, undeniably, are becoming to slender young women with slim ankles. The small parlour, too, was her room, furnished and decorated according to her notions. George Selwin, not uncritical in such matters, glanced at fresh chintzes, bowls of narcissi and daffodils, and many books. He was pleased to see the books. Above the bookcases hung some mezzotints with here and there a coloured engraving.

Tom greeted her informally :

" Scared us stiff, you have."

" I thought he was dead," murmured Missy.

" You look cool enough now."

She turned to Roddy's father.

" Will you sit down, Mr. Selwin ? Father, I'm sure, has offered you some sort of refreshment."

" I haven't yet. We drank a glass of strong ale at the farmer's house, good stuff ! Now, we're thirsting for some information from you."

At once Missy guessed that the farmer had excited this thirst. Her cheeks grew warm. Her eyes tried to read two very dissimilar countenances. George Selwin, apparently, was masking his feelings. He presented to her virginal gaze the same courteous, slightly frigid demeanour which had provoked her to ride away from his son. Her father seemed to be heated and cross.

"Explanations," she repeated softly, "not information, daddy. The farmer was there; he saw everything; he must have told you—everything."

"He did," said Tom incisively. "It's up to you, Missy, to explain, as you say, your *actions*. I can't sling words with you, but don't you forget that I had you trained to talk better than I can. You refused to marry the Commander, and quite right, too, till we'd heard what his father said about it. I stood in with you. We don't butt in where we're not wanted. You've changed your mind about that."

"No."

"Hay?"

"I *am* wanted."

Having said this, she sat down primly, folded her hands upon her lap, and waited for further developments. Tom, in some perplexity, turned to his partner. That gentleman did not fail him.

"You mean, my dear, that you are wanted by my son. But you knew as much before."

"I didn't," she confessed ingenuously. "I—I couldn't measure how much he wanted me. He had talked to me about friendship. We were a lot together. And the papers made a sort of romance of it. That was dreadful to me. The villagers talked about us. And he asked me to marry him after—after——"

"After you had saved his life?"

"Yes. And then——"

She paused, blushing.

"And then——?"

She lifted her head proudly, meeting George Selwin's eyes. Each was probing deep beneath the surface, but the man probed deeper than the maid.

"I was afraid that I had given myself away. If father insists upon explanations, I must tell all the truth. I'm not ashamed now. But then——! I said to myself that perhaps he wanted me because he knew that I wanted him. And behind that again was the fear that I should come between you and him. So I said 'no.' Men are very stupid——"

"Some," amended George Selwin. "Don't spare me. I daresay my son was stupid."

"He thought I didn't care. That was too much after all that he had done for us. I let him see that I cared. Perhaps I wanted to find out how much he cared. But, all the same, I said 'no.'"

George Selwin glanced at Tom Kinsman, who was listening open-mouthed to this amazing revelation of a young girl's heart. A shrewd observer decided that a "partner" was "weakening." He said pleasantly:

"I congratulate you."

"What about, Mr. Selwin."

"Your daughter impressed me this morning as looking uncommonly like a jolly boy. Jolly boys despise those reserves of speech, which, in my day, were regarded as a maiden's proof armour. Men, being stupid, do not always perceive the chinks in the armour. It is refreshing to meet a young lady who is as honest as a jolly boy." He looked again at Missy, adding quietly: "How did you discover that he wanted you as much as you wanted him?"

"He followed me to-day. He—he isn't a horseman, Mr. Selwin, although he's improving. I went at a bad place to escape from him, to escape, too, from myself. But he meant to capture me. I thought he was dead—I—I thought that I had killed him. The farmer told you what happened. I'm not ashamed."

"And my son. How is he feeling?"

"Quite comfortable."

"Really?"

"As comfortable as could be expected under the circumstances."

George Selwin stood up. Missy rose as he approached her. He took her hand.

"My son has asked you again to become his wife?" Missy nodded. "Have you made up your mind to marry him?"

"Yes."

"Even if your father and I withhold our consent?"

"Yes."

He released her hand and walked to the window, turning his back upon her. She supposed that he was moved. He was. Necessity constrained him to compose features which were twitching with the desire to laugh, although the joke was against himself. Missy, he had decided, would be a match for Bandycutt and Gannaway. Still, the comedy was not as yet played out.

He came back to her with an impassive face.

"Are you prepared to face poverty with my son?"

"We can each of us earn money."

"Apart."

"We have faced that."

Tom Kinsman jumped up.

"You'd chuck me, Missy?"

"Never, dad. If there is any chucking it will be done by you."

"I must see my son," said Selwin solemnly.

Tom nodded and winked. Missy saw the wink, but it might have been a blink. Woman's intuition sustained her. She pinned her faith to the wink, as she lifted a roguish face to Selwin.

"Wouldn't you like to take a kiss from me to your son?"

II

Before father and son met in the hotel, a local doctor had made Roddy *comfortable* so far as ease of body is concerned. He could sit in an armchair and rehearse what French dramatists term *la scène obligatoire*. He had rushed his fences ; he had burned his boats. Even in metaphor he regarded himself as that interesting hybrid, a sailor-horseman. As a knight of the pigskin, he had won his spurs and a wife better qualified to wear them. As a sailor without boats, he wondered where he would find one if his father remained obstinately of the opinion that Missy was not the right sort.

George Selwin came in.

From his face, Roddy could glean nothing.

" I have been chasing you, my boy."

" It was a topping hunt," said Roddy. " Where did you hit the line, sir ? "

" At the farmer's house. A good fellow, but talkative."

Roddy took the hint and remained silent.

" Are you feeling all right ? "

" I am."

Selwin senior sat down, placing upon his nose a businesslike pince-nez. From the pocket of his coat he took out a blue document.

" This," he said slowly, " is an indenture of partnership. I had it drawn up before I left town. It makes you a junior partner in the firm when it is signed. I had left blank your percentage of my profits. You understand, don't you, that I have the right, as senior partner in the firm, to make my son a junior partner and to allocate to him what share I please of my profits. Bandycutt and Gannaway have nothing to do with that ; they are not affected financially. They are affected in another sense. If you dropped out, for instance——"

He paused, keenly eyeing Roddy. Under trying circumstances, he appeared nearly (not quite) as cool as Missy. The navy and the hunting field are great disciplinary schools.

“If I dropped out——?”

“Well, the boot would be on another foot in accordance with the clauses of my agreement of partnership with B. and G. Failing you, they can nominate a junior partner or partners, and allocate to him or them a share of their profits. In other words, I have first call on nominating a junior partner, and, which is of much greater importance as far as you are concerned, if I nominate my son, he, in the event of my death, or my retirement, would become the senior partner and receive the senior partner’s share of the loot. Have I made this perfectly plain?”

“You have, sir.”

“Give your undivided attention to this further point. If I do not exercise my right to make you, practically, my successor, that right lapses. And, in that case, when I died, the name of Selwin would drop out of the firm, and my partners would pay over to my executors a specific sum, which would represent what is called ‘goodwill.’ That sum of money, as you may suppose, in no way represents my average profits capitalized.”

“I understand.”

“Good! I intended to give you this indenture,” he tapped the stiff pages of foolscap, “if, as I hinted before, you found down here a young lady whom I could accept wholeheartedly as a daughter. Before I say more may I ask you if you have decided to marry Miss Kinsman if I withhold my consent to such a marriage?”

April evenings are cool; a fire was burning in the grate, dully smouldering. Roddy said nervously but firmly:

"I intend to marry the one woman in the world for me. I do not question your right, sir, to put that—that wedding present into the fire."

"Well played, Roddy! You're a good fellow, but you've given me a bad hour or two. Perhaps I wanted to pull your leg for a minute. I have been with Tom Kinsman. I have just left—Missy. She was too much for you; she's too much for me. I've hauled down my flag. You can hoist this at your main."

He handed the indenture of partnership, adding genially:

"Your share of the profits will give you and Missy some hunting. By the way, she gave me a kiss to deliver to you, but I propose keeping that."

III

Mary Chaundy was the first to hear of Missy's engagement. Tom told her that same evening. Mary smiled inwardly, because her old friend appeared to be in boisterous spirits. In a sense—so she reflected—he had "bested" in a "deal" a man quite as shrewd as himself. Mary had listened sympathetically to other successful deals. Upon occasion she "salted" some of Tom's statements, accepting him at his own valuation as an impassioned optimist. An unhappy marriage had turned Mary into something of a pessimist. Widowhood, however, and the satisfactory conduct of a prosperous business had brightened her horizon.

Tom's eyes were twinkling, but he exhibited signs of nervousness familiar to the proprietress of the "Bell Inn." His thin fingers moved restlessly; he indulged in superfluous gesture.

"He thought my girl was not good enough for his son. I did mention the fact that Sir John wished she was his daughter. That was one on the point. Then Timbuctoo trotted into the yard without his rider. I shall never sell the old horse, Mary. When the fun of the fair is

over for him he shall end his days in my water meadows. Timbuctoo made this match."

Mary nodded. Presently Tom went his way, rubbing his hands and chuckling. Mary closed up as usual, inspected her sleeping children, and retired to her bedroom. The window overlooked The Yard and Tom's house. Beyond, crowning a small hill, were some immemorial yews sharply silhouetted against the star-lit sky. Mary sat down and gazed at them. To the left of the trees, out of sight, lay the village cemetery, which held Mr. Chaundy and the unfortunate Mrs. Kinsman.

Mary's thoughts were with her.

Em'ly Kinsman, not Timbuctoo, had made this match.

The ultimate triumph of good over evil, the slow grinding of the mills of God, startled a woman not given to moralizing, too busy to look back, disdainful, like Tom, of unhappy yesterdays. But to-night, the past unrolled itself. A feminine mind dealt with it emotionally and instinctively. The evil in Em'ly had made a better man of Tom and a finer woman of his daughter. Her own husband's indolence and selfishness, his ridiculous sense of his own importance, had quickened in her, as in Tom, indefatigable energies, new potentialities, and a saner perception of the values in life. . . .

Mary sighed. She was thinking that Tom would be lonely without Missy.

IV

Not for some days was there any confidential talk between Mary and Tom Kinsman. But a clever woman kept a discreet eye on an excitable neighbour. From her bedroom window she could see and hear him. Jovial laughter floated upwards. Did it ring quite true?

Late one evening he bustled into the bar-parlour, and began talking about the end of the hunting-season, his

approaching sale, the horses to be turned out to grass, all the details of his business. Mary listened attentively. It was not her habit to talk to Tom about her business. She had repaid long ago the grant in aid.

"Good times, Mary, but a case of rabies is reported in Westhampton."

"Oh, dear!"

"It may mean no buck hunting in August."

"Whatever will you do?"

"I shall drop a bit," said Tom, philosophically. "That doesn't worry me too much. But I do hate kicking my heels in the office. Anyway, I'm the happiest man in Puddenhurst."

"Are you?"

"Course I am."

"You are losing Missy. I have my work; you have yours, but work may become a tedious business when there's nobody to work for."

He frowned at her.

"I have my customers; you have yours."

"I have my children."

"Good kids—take after you."

"Thanks. I'm worrying about you, Tom."

"Lord love you! Why?"

"You aren't as happy as you pretend."

"Ho! So sharp you'll cut yourself if you aren't careful. Do you want me to own up to you that I was tempted to keep Missy?"

"Were you?"

"I hate to tell you, but that tipped the scale. For a minute or two the Commander's father saw me at my ugliest and saw himself, too, not at his best. We were humbugging each other and ourselves. Promise cocking a snook at performance. Got it?"

"Yes."

"Human nature is a queer thing, Mary, when the

beast is tearing us. I was torn when Em'ly left me. Pride maddened me. Call it original sin."

"As good a name as any other."

"Not out of me yet, my dear. How's your business, hay?"

"Increasing every day, Tom; getting more than a woman can manage."

Tom stared at what appeared to him to be a perfectly guileless face. More, he recognized in Mary's eyes and about the drooping lips a mute appeal for helpful advice. Hastily, he took a bird's-eye glance at this increasing business; he saw the hordes of "chariabangers" and disappointed travellers turned away because the "Bell" was always full. Being still a thruster, he exclaimed without pausing to think:

"Gosh! Why don't you marry again, Mary?"

She remained silent. Tom looked her over as if she were a "bit o' blood" from the Shires. If this sharp scrutiny disconcerted or amused her she didn't show it. Mary was nearing the end of her seventh lustrum and admitted it. Some ladies count ten instead of five candles to the lustre. She was not one of these. Her skin still remained fair and clear. Her hair suggested the art that conceals art, being simply and becomingly arranged.

"You ought to marry again," he affirmed with energy.

Mary smiled faintly.

"You are not the first man to suggest that, Tom."

"May be not. Once bit, twice shy, hay? Maxims help a fellow out, don't they? Someway, knowing what a blinking bloomer you made with your first, I never thought of better luck next time. Same here," he tapped his chest. "But I couldn't marry again."

"N-n-no."

Tom was warming to his work, striding on and on. He asked himself why so comely and so capable a woman had not remarried.

"Must be a lot of mugs about," he murmured. "I can't think off hand of a husband worthy of you, my dear. I'd like to lay my hands on Mr. Right."

He beamed at her affectionately. Mary's pensive face pleased him. Obviously she didn't resent this intimate talk. He wondered what she would demand from a second husband.

"Bit hard to please. Quite right, too. You'd take no risks with a young 'un. You want a quiet customer with manners."

"Stuff and nonsense!" said Mary sharply.

A slight acerbity in her tone surprised him.

"Not cross, are you?" he asked anxiously.

"Not a bit. Dear me! I haven't offered you a glass of wine."

She hurried out of the room. Was she blushing? Tom awaited her return with impatience. She was decanting, of course, a bottle of the 1908. From wine his thoughts roved to food. Mary, certainly, had extraordinary aptitudes for tickling palates, a rare housekeeper.

We have here a situation which recalls to mind my Uncle Toby and the Widow Wadman. It will be remembered that my Uncle Toby was not a water-drinker. Those who know their Sterne will remember, also, that the widow felt something stirring within her in my Uncle Toby's favour. The widow, moreover, knew that nothing was stirring in Uncle Toby—and governed herself accordingly.

Mary Chaundy came back bearing a decanter, two glasses and some thin water biscuits.

"The 1908?"

"No."

"What is it?"

"Jubilee port, second Jubilee, 1897, a better vintage than 1896. You ought to keep that 1908, Tom. It's still on the crude side. Give it another five years. It's

coming on nicely, maturing quickly, but it hasn't quite got there yet."

"Bless me! You're a wonder, Mary. I dare swear you're right."

"I know I'm right."

She filled two glasses that challenged Tom's attention. The stems were cut, and the bowls were exquisitely engraved.

"Never saw these glasses before."

"They are late eighteenth century. I bought them at a sale. I have never used them before. Aren't they finely proportioned?"

Tom examined them, but he was thinking of Mary's proportions, mental and physical. As he sipped his wine he thought more and more of her.

"You've a knack," he observed, "of picking up the right stuff. Never tasted a better glass of port."

"It's a pleasure to see you drinking it properly."

Tom went on sipping his wine and observing the comely widow. So far with detachment, although attachment was not absent. Ever the victim of any new idea that beguiled his fancy, he returned obstinately to the subject of Mrs. Chaundy's need of a second husband.

"I wasn't joking just now."

"What were we talking about?"

"You ought to marry again, my dear. The more I think of it, the surer I am of it. Beats me that I never thought of it before. Neighbours and friends ought to think more about each other. Selfish chap I am! You don't mind my talking freely?"

"Not at all."

"We're two sensible persons. Why not talk freely?"

"I see no reason why we shouldn't."

"Tell me, Mary, have you seen anybody lately whom you liked better than yourself?"

"I am hard to please."

She smiled at him, almost maternally.

"Course you are. There's nobody in Puddenhurst. You wouldn't take a man with moss on him? No. Might find somebody at a hydro at Cronmouth or anywhere along the coast."

Mary shook her head.

"I went to London to buy a wall-paper. I looked at dozens. I came back here and found just what I wanted in our High Street."

Tom, impregnable in his detachment, and considering Mrs. Chaundy with ever-increasing interest as a "prize packet," said earnestly:

"You know, Mary, I'm hot on this. You say there have been—bidders? But you turned 'em down. Now I'm trying hard to see the right sort for you."

"It's very friendly of you, I'm sure."

"We've always been friends. We think alike about what matters; we run things on straight lines. We have the same objectives. Commander's word, not mine. Being a very masterful woman——"

"Am I?"

"No doubt of that. You mean to go on running your little show just as I shall go on running mine. Mr. Right must have a business of his own, something to link up with yours, hay? A man, for instance, who could run a lively motor works."

Mary betrayed slight confusion. Tom, in his excitement, had edged nearer to her. He laid his hand upon her soft wrist. No caress was intended, but Mary couldn't know that. Tom plunged on and on, quite unaware that he was on perilously soft ground.

"Come to think of it, Mary, you want a man something like me."

Unconsciously he gripped her wrist.

"You are a dear, Tom."

Tom abandoned the lady's wrist, seized his glass, and gulped down what was left in it, a significant action.

Mary, to cover her own confusion, pushed the decanter towards him.

"No," said Tom firmly. "Not to-night. Perhaps to-morrow, if you'd care to have another chat."

"The wine will keep till to-morrow."

V

He found himself crossing The Yard. It was past eleven. For no reason whatever memory played pranks with him. He recalled that dreadful evening when he had buried Phoebe's tartlets. Again he muttered to himself: "Lots of good women in this old world."

He entered his house quietly, and tip-toed up the stairs. Missy's room was opposite to his own. A thin streak of gaslight showed itself under the door, and he noticed that it was not quite closed. Probably the little besom was reading in bed. He paused at the door, listening. Not a sound! He pushed open the door. Missy lay fast asleep. A book had fallen upon the carpet.

Tom approached. Missy's left hand lay palm down upon the pillow.

He didn't kiss the deflected little finger, but he stared at it portentously. Then he turned off the gas, and walked silently into his own room which was far from suggesting a nuptial chamber. A narrow camp bedstead met his eye. Feeling strangely wide awake, he glanced at a small bookcase and grinned. He had never been a reader. But he had gone through a course of Shakespeare solely on Missy's account. He had read aloud to the child other books recommended by Mary Chaundy. Highbrows might sneer if the titles of these were set down.

He flung wide open the window. Across the yard he could see a light in another window, which burned steadily. The blind of this window was drawn. Black upon amber Tom saw the figure of Mary. It vanished.

“ Gosh ! ”

After a long pause, he spoke again :

“ Why not ? ”

The blind opposite went up with a snap, clearly audible. At her window he could see Mary. She appeared to be gazing across The Yard, as he was. Perhaps she could see him as plainly as he could see her. Presently he decided that she must be sitting at her window.

Furtively, he blew a kiss to her.

THE END.

*Taylor Garnett Evans & Co.,
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Manchester.*

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The Yard By HORACE ANNESLEY VACHELL

Author of "Quinneys," "The House of Peril," "Change Partners," etc.

This sporting novel deals with the adventures and misadventures of Tom Kinsman, a horsedealer. The hunting scenes, laid in the New Forest, are vividly portrayed by a writer who knows his subject thoroughly. We meet a gallant son of the sea who is a "mug" on a horse, and whose inexperience provokes the pity and sympathy of a Diana of the Chase. There is a flavour of "Quinneys" about this novel. Tom Kinsman is a "card" somewhat of the type of Joe Quinney, and we get an amusing insight into the tricks of the horsedealing trade. Incidentally, there is a very thrilling murder. Mr. Vachell's humour and effective power of narrative will strongly appeal, even to readers not specially interested in sport.

Wisdom's Daughter : The Life and Love Story of She-Who-Must-Be-Obeyed

By SIR H. RIDER HAGGARD

Author of "She," "King Solomon's Mines," "She and Allán," etc.

The present romance is the last of the trilogy telling of the wondrous doings of Ayesha, "She," that mystic being of beauty, power and vision created by the imagination of Sir Rider Haggard. It is represented as being written by Ayesha herself and entrusted to a learned companion of Leo Vincey, the Kallikrates of another age. Reborn as the daughter of an Arab chief, of transcendent beauty, but cold and a searcher after knowledge rather than love, Ayesha is later provoked to acquire mortal passions—only to meet with refusal from the man whom she desires. This parable of the eternal struggle between the spirit and the flesh is presented in an engrossing story of adventure, peril, passion and disillusionment, and retains all the glamour that a Rider Haggard novel invariably exercises.

The Gazebo By BARONESS VON HUTTEN

Author of "Pam," "The Lordship of Love," etc.

The particular gazebo which gives the name to this book is a windowed balcony overlooking the village street, in the country home of Peg Doria, a well-known novelist, who befriends Jenny Mayes, a clever, but half educated, middle-class London girl, and later her own rival in love. It is from the gazebo that Jenny overhears a conversation from which she gathers that her suitor and Mrs. Doria care for each other; and from the gazebo, too, Mrs. Doria looks down on her derelict husband, who vainly tries to create a scandal in the village.

Men, Maids and Mustard-Pot

By GILBERT FRANKAU

Author of "Peter Jackson, Cigar Merchant," etc.

Mr. Gilbert Frankau's fame as a novelist is widely known, and the sales of his works are counted in hundreds of thousands. In this volume, the first collection of his short stories to be published, he shows himself master of an art which is even more difficult than novel-writing. "Men, Maids and Mustard-Pot" is as long as a full-length Frankau novel. Each of the tales in it is a *tour-de-force*. From the heart of the English Shires to the heart of London's West End, from the palm-fringed beaches of Malaya to the tobacco-piled wharves of Havana harbour, Mr. Frankau's characters, men, maidens and that most amazing horse in fiction, Mustard-Pot, play out their parts in a series of thrilling incidents.

The Commandment of Moses

By STEPHEN McKENNA

Author of "Soliloquy," "The Secret Victory," "Lady Lilith," etc.

The heroine, a beautiful girl of to-day, is nobly planned and retains our respect and admiration throughout in her unfailing resolve to "carry on," despite the conventions of her world and the possible scruples of the man of her heart.

The Red Redmaynes

By EDEN PHILLPOTTS

Author of "The Grey Room," "The Three Brothers,"

"Told at the Plume," etc.

In his new story Mr. Eden Phillpotts again displays the masterly handling of crime and mystery which rendered "The Grey Room" so notable a success. Three men, two of whom are brothers, are successively murdered, suspicion in each case falling on Robert Redmayne. Two of the greatest detectives, an Englishman and an American, set out to track down and arrest the criminal. Mystery, excitement, and intense human interest distinguish this thrilling Dartmoor narrative, the characters in which are skilfully and realistically depicted.

Colin

By E. F. BENSON

Author of "Dodo Wonders," "Miss Mapp," etc.

In Elizabethan times, Colin Stanier, first Earl of Yardley, made a certain Satanic bargain, ensuring to himself and those of his descendants, who did not personally repudiate it, boundless prosperity at the traditional price of the Faust legend. The story relates how, three hundred years later at the present day, young Colin Stanier of the direct line confirms the deed executed by his ancestor.

A Book of Stories

By **ROBERT HICHENS**

Author of "The Garden of Allah," "Spirit of the Time," etc.

These four stories are told with all the art of a practised story-teller. The "Last Time" deals with the tragedy of a woman, who makes a confession of the wreck of her life to a man in order that another woman's life may be made happy. "The Letter" is a love story in Mr. Hichens' most successful vein, with the picturesque countryside as its background. In "The Villa by the Sea" the author portrays in a brilliant psychological study some "lingering influences" and their effects on sensitive persons, while "The Façade" is a delightfully humorous tale of a beautiful "high-brow" actress. In each story the reader will find enough vivid and arresting incidents and realistic character studies as almost to compose a complete novel.

Time is Whispering

By **ELIZABETH ROBINS**

Author of "The Magnetic North," etc.

In her new book Miss Robins gives us a most arresting story and an extremely clever psychological study.

Henry Ellerton returns, a confirmed woman-hater, to his remote English estate after the war, to find that a widow with her son has secured the lease of the house nearest to his. His growing friendship for the lady arouses the hostility of the lady's son. Soon scandalous tales begin to circulate in the neighbourhood. The rest of the book represents the difficulty of a man and woman in middle life, faced on the one hand by the rigid dictates of convention, and on the other by the habits and prejudices of years. The author has chosen difficult types for her chief characters, but she has drawn them with a skill and consistency which will surprise even those readers who know her best. With its deep human interest and original plot, "Antagonisms" is a book which will appeal to all.

Madge Hinton's Husbands

By **MARGARET BAILLIE-SAUNDERS**

Author of "Becky & Co.," "MacBride's First Wife," "Makeshifts," etc.

Mrs. Baillie-Saunders' latest story is chiefly concerned with her heroine's matrimonial experiences with two men of widely different natures. The first, a young wastrel of good family, inevitably awakens at best her pity; the other deserves and wins her love. Their happiness in the second marriage is cruelly disturbed by the wastrel's sudden reappearance, and the writer's penetrating insight into feminine human nature is well illustrated by her realistic handling of the appalling choice between the two men so undeservedly thrust upon Madge Hinton. Arrestingly human and witty, this story, despite its sombre theme, will provoke more laughter than tears, as anything true to human nature inevitably does.

Miss Bracegirdle and Others

By STACY AUMONIER

Author of "The Love-a-Duck," "Heartbeat," etc.

In Mr. Aumonier's work the short story returns to its own again. The present batch fully maintains the high standards of "The Love-a-Duck." Mr. Aumonier again reveals himself as a fresh, humorous and interesting writer. In craftsmanship, vivid imagination, and in that whimsical understanding and insight into human nature which is peculiarly his own, each of his stories is a high artistic achievement.

Vanderdecken

By H. de VERE STACPOOLE

Author of "The Pearl Fishers," etc.

Here is a novel of to-day absolutely alive. Each character is individual. You are seized by Hank Fischer at once, and with him and Bud du Cane and Tommie Coulthurst you go through the strangest adventures on the Pacific Coast to an end logical and approached mainly through the character of the chief protagonist, Bob Cardon. The sea fills the book, and its song resounds from the Golden Gate to San Nicolas and the Bay of Wales.

Our Earth Here

By DOLF WYLLARDE

Author of "Mafoota," "The Lavender Lad," etc.

The scenes of these stories are laid in such different parts of the globe as the Seychelles Islands, the West Indies, Somaliland, Devonshire, Canada, and the Red Sea. But, human nature being the same all the world over, they are only the staging to the drama of love and hate, heroism unrecorded and passions that betray themselves. Too little is known of the Colonial Service and of those who "carry the Flag" to remote places—the silent builders of Empire. What Miss Wyllarde has seen and known she records with much descriptive charm and powerful delineation for the benefit of those who stay at home, the temptations, failures, tragedies of this "our earth here."

A White Man

By MRS. FRANCES EVERARD

Author of "A Daughter of the Sand," etc.

This "romance of the East" recounts the adventures of a beautiful girl, who, scorning the devotion of a young admirer, seeks distraction in the glamour of the East. Here she finds marriage, but learning a terrible secret about her husband, soon yearns for the Englishman whom she had left. After many excitements and some dangers she wins her true happiness. Mrs. Everard presents characters of real interest, and the circumstances of her story are replete with dramatic imagination.

And It Was So

By WINIFRED GRAHAM

Author of "John Edgar's Angels," "Breakers on the Sand," "The Daughter Terrible," etc.

Brightly written, romantic and picturesque, this story will prove one of Miss Graham's happiest conceptions. A fascinating child, Daffodil, comes to live with her grandmother, a resident of Hampton Court Palace. The governess, Miss Price, with her dual personality, is a most remarkable character. Daffodil's youthful presence soon brightens the life in that old-world atmosphere, and thoughts of love begin to stir. After many trials a wonderful surprise awaits the true-hearted lovers, the unsympathetic relatives are discomfited, and a charming story ends in a manner that readers, young and old, will vote delightful.

Next of Kin

By W. E. NORRIS

Author of "Tony the Exceptional," "Proud Peter,"
"The Triumphs of Sara," etc.

The Next of Kin is a young New Zealander, heir through the deaths of two cousins to the title of his uncle. He fails, however, to win the lady of his choice, his cousin, and, bitterly disappointed, returns to his home. Her subsequent marriage proving disastrous, her true lover is aroused to devise means to set her free, and their adventures end in their happiness. Infused with the skill of an accomplished writer and distinguished with well-drawn characters and interesting incidents, the story holds the reader's attention from beginning to end.

Worlds Apart

By M. P. WILLCOCKS

Author of "The Sleeping Partner," "The Keystone," etc.

Two widely divergent characters, one a supreme but lovable egoist, the other an idealist, find in middle age the real challenge to their several ways of life from the younger generation, determined, active men from the war, whose fate is in the hands of circumstances, at work before they were born.

The story is one of heredity, hidden, transformed, but never eliminated. There are tragic moments, but the tone is one of humour, for the two forces inevitably opposed are depicted with a rare sympathy and a skill which holds the reader's interest throughout.

Conjugal Rights

By "RITA"

Author of "Peg the Rake," etc.

Of the seven stories that make up this entertaining volume, the first three are concerned with matrimonial troubles, while of the remainder two have the note of tragedy and two are pleasant little sentimental comedies. The writer in all her varying moods never fails to please, for her stories are inspired by a sound and healthy morality, a real knowledge of human nature, and a conviction, founded on a long experience, that a happy ending is not necessarily untrue to life.

Sir or Madam ?

By BERTA RUCK

Author of "Miss Million's Maid," "The Girls at His Billet," etc.

No previous work of the author has made such demands upon her imagination and skilful delineation of character as her latest novel. A good-looking girl of society to-day, who seeking adventure takes a situation in a bachelor's establishment and passes a fortnight there without detection either from her employer or fellow-servants—such is the highly original plot of Berta Ruck's delightful new story. Its developments and final conclusion may or may not be those with which the reader will agree. But the freshness, vivacity and resourceful imagination make it irresistibly attractive reading. "Sir or Madam ?" will rank as one of the best of the writer's many successes.

By a New Novelist of Powerful Discrimination

A Maid in Armour By VICTORIA T. COATS

To be the first woman to write a History of Women, an epoch-making work that all the world will treasure as an enduring record of the lives of great women—such was the life's ambition of two women, the main characters of this noteworthy first novel. To both came the opportunity. But the mother sacrifices her chance of its attainment to love and marriage. In her daughter she lives again. The latter yields no rights of brain and labour to the claims of sex—only to realise later that true love is often woman's highest fulfilment. The story is a penetrating and poignant study of woman's psychology, admirable in detail and delineation of character and handled with a craftsmanship that many experienced writers might envy.

That Fellow MacArthur By SELWYN JEPSON

Author of "The Qualified Adventurer," etc.

Mr. Jepson's many readers will welcome an old favourite in his new novel. It tells in a thrilling story of the romance and adventures that come into the life of a Scotsman, one Ian MacArthur, who appeared in "The Qualified Adventurer" as a friend of the hero, Duffy. MacArthur, of placid temperament, is caught up into a whirl of circumstances that turn him into a thorough-going adventurer, in spite of his desire to lead an orderly life. A natural woman-hater, he falls at last into the toils of the little god, who singles him out to love Joan, the beautiful heroine. Their adventures together on the unknown waters of the Amazons bring the story to an ingenious and surprising climax.

Rooted Out

By DOROTHEA CONYERS

Author of "The Strayings of Sandy," etc.

The story of a wild Irishman, who, when his home is burnt, goes to England to live with an uncle, and there retrieves his fallen fortunes. The English girl, whom he loves, objects to his wild ways. As always, the character-drawing and dialogue admirably illustrate the writer's high quality.

The Lovable Lunatic

By PHYLLIS AUSTIN

Author of "The Grass Eater," "The Giant Doctor," etc.

A big, shy, gentle young man, apparently wealthy, and a charming girl meet and are mutually attracted. Their course of true love is halting but ultimately leads to their happiness, largely through the help of other inmates of the house which the lovers share in common—a faithful little actress, an elderly and reduced spinster, the true-hearted lodging-house slavey overdriven by the iron-hard landlady, herself encumbered with a wine-bibbing husband. A fresh and sprightly story in which the author allows full play to her powers to charm and displays a talent for character-drawing not unworthy of Dickens.

Green Butterflies

By ROY BRIDGES

Author of "Dead Men's Gold," "The Immortal Dawn," etc.

A story of Australian life, with the action covering three or four generations, and the setting in Van Diemen's Land when the Penal Settlement was in full swing. The joys of a country girl who, brought to new surroundings, is loved and loves too well, are realistically described and tempered with the trials and tribulations which naturally beset her and her offspring. The various scenes and incidents are depicted with much skill and charm.

Stony Ground

By LADY MILES

Author of "The Red Flame," "Red, White and Grey," etc.

The study of a strong, very egotistical woman, who subdues all who approach her. She and her delightfully human sister are very strictly brought up. After marriage she becomes a virtuous vampire, intensely cold and conventional. By egoism and virtue she absorbs all the enjoyment of life from those who love her to conquer them, until they have no individuality left. The writer's motive is the appalling strength of an egotistical conventional virtue, backed by respectability and apparently irreproachable conduct, which, lacking all sympathy, does more harm than any vice could do

The Miracle

By E. TEMPLE THURSTON

Author of "David and Jonathan," etc.

A powerful story of life among Irish farm folk. Mary Kirwan, pale and lovely, throbbing with an uneasy sense of life and passion, lives in drudgery with her parents, a close-fisted farmer and his shy but understanding wife. Mary marries Fennel, a well-to-do fisherman, gives birth to a son whom he thinks his own, and learns to love her husband. But it is another who has also loved her and whom she now realises that she too unwillingly loves. The characters, typical of Irish life with all its realities, sentiment and superstitions, are portrayed with a rare sympathy and insight.

The Lower Pool

By ELLEN THORNEYCROFT FOWLER

Author of "A Double Thread," "Beauty and Bands," etc.

The story of two friends, one of whom chooses the religious and the other the secular life, as told by the latter. She is a woman whose chief characteristic is that she loves much, and her love-story is a variant upon the theme of the love-song in *Twelfth Night*, "Journeys end in lovers meeting." After many changes and chances, many difficulties and disappointments, she reaches her journey's end at last, but in quite a different way from that which she had anticipated. Incidentally she touches upon many of the problems of a woman's life and offers her own solutions of them. "The Lower Pool" is an arresting character study drawn with the skill and delicacy that are distinguishing marks in all Miss Fowler's novels.

The Man Who Understood

By "RITA"

Author of "Peg the Rake," etc.

The man who understands the heart of a woman, the weakness of man, and the faith and trust of a little child, is indeed a great character meriting complete and detailed delineation. "The Man Who Understood" has a singularly human and lovable personality, always believing in the best and forgiving the worst; adapting the healing powers of Nature to man's skill and patience, and never ceasing to preach the axiom that to love much is to forgive much.

Lady Jem

By NETTA SYRETT

Author of "One of Three," "God of Chance," etc.

Miss Syrett has successfully accomplished an extremely difficult task in giving her readers so convincing and highly entertaining a portrait of a personality familiar and endeared to many—Samuel Pepys. Lord Sandwich, Mrs. Pepys, Deborah and Mistress Knipp are also among the characters in this vivid and delightful romance, in which the rakish Sir Arthur Boucher figures as the villain, till he succumbs to the plague and all ends happily.

The Letters of Jean Armitter

By UNA L. SILBERRAD

Author of "Green Pastures," "The Honest Man," etc.

Jean Armitter, a spinster of thirty-five, becomes possessed of a small income and with it, she imagines, the liberty to lead her own life in her own way. In this ambition, however, she finds herself effectually thwarted by relatives, friends and other ties. A charming love story runs through the book, which ends happily, for Jean is a sound, cheery Englishwoman, very typical of her class to-day. Her letters, indeed, are so full of human interest that the reader comes quickly to regard them as real letters from a living person.

A Great American Novel

In the Days of Poor Richard

By IRVING BACHELLER

Author of "A Man for the Ages," etc.

The period of this virile and romantic story is the youth of Benjamin Franklin, essentially the heroic period in American history. The author's treatment is individual and highly effective, and in his skilful hands his fellow-countrymen in their dramatic struggle for justice and freedom become real and friendly human beings and retain the reader's sympathy throughout. A stirring love interest runs through the story, with plenty of action, adventures and escapades. Interesting glimpses are given of Benjamin Franklin, King George III. and Queen Charlotte, and, on the continent, of King Louis, Voltaire, Mirabeau, Robespierre, Dr. Guillotine, Jack Irons, the young adventurer and hero, the faithful English girl whom he loves and wins, the far-famed, lovable old scout, Solomon Bincus, are the chief among the characters, famous and infamous, of this remarkable historical romance.

The Fountain of Green Fire

By PERCY JAMES BREBNER

Author of "Christopher Quarles," "The Top Landing," etc.

The Fountain of Green Fire is the marvellous emerald, and a determination to possess it prompts the characters, good and evil, of Mr. Brebner's vivid story to many exciting adventures. The plot is well contrived, the story moves with a swing, and mystery and thrilling escapades abound. The hero is refreshingly human and, with the girl whom later he marries, retains the reader's sympathetic interest until the jewel hunt is brought to a satisfactory and entirely exciting conclusion.

The Watsons : A Fragment by JANE AUSTEN
Concluded by L. OULTON

A keen student and lover of Jane Austen, Miss Oulton has followed the lines laid down for this novel and found in a notebook after Miss Austen's death. She has carried out a most difficult task so successfully that the reader will share with the members of the Austen family, to whom she showed her work, an inability to recognise the place where she takes up the story from her distinguished predecessor. The Watsons of its title are the small provincial family, the comedy of whose daily lives is detailed with that exquisite touch in which Jane Austen is still unrivalled. The love of Lord Osborne for one of its members gives the cachet of romance to a fascinating and admirably lucid story.

The Man Behind By G. B. BURGIN

Author of "Many Memories," "Manetta's Marriage," etc., etc.

In this, his 67th novel, Mr. Burgin relates with great humour and gusto the adventures of young Anthony Grote. He "chums up" with one Marcovitch, ostensibly a Polish refugee, who accompanies him to Constantinople, triumphantly rescuing him from the consequences of his inexperience. This story of Turkish intrigue and dissimulation, handled with all the author's intimate knowledge of "The Unspeakable One," will do much to enhance Mr. Burgin's steadily growing reputation as a novelist as well as a successful writer of memoirs.

Seven for a Secret By MRS. MARY WEBB

Author of "The House in Dormer Forest," etc.

The scenes of this intensely human story are laid in the border country of England and Wales, where the writer depicts the life and character at the sheep farms, fairs and village inns with an intimate knowledge and an all-pervading sensibility of Nature. Gillian, the well-to-do farmer's daughter, scorns the humble devotions of the farm labourer, Rideout. Moreover, Ralph Elmer, a man of position, stirs her love and ambitions. The climax is tragic and passionate, and the reader follows with an unfailing interest the fates of the characters in a story of uncommon beauty and power.

End of the Road By MARK SOMERS

Author of "Merely Michael," etc.

A tale of stirring events on the Indian Frontier, admirably handled and whose characters, good or evil, are living human beings who hold the reader's interest throughout. Fierce in hate, straight in honour, with sunshine in his heart, young Denis O'Malley has the feel of the Frontier in his blood. He loves wisely and well, and the tale of his misadventures, perils, and ultimate victory both in love and fighting is related with an unflagging dramatic force and a skilful blending of romance and realistic adventure.

Carina

By ISABEL C. CLARKE

Author of "Average Cabins," "Ursula Finch," etc.

The scene of this novel is laid in Rome and Sussex, and in it Miss Clarke unfolds the story of a young and gifted Catholic girl who marries a man not of her own faith and a good deal older than herself. Jim Ramsden is a widower with one son, and he is torn between two conflicting emotions, his love for his young wife and his fear that through her influence the boy may become a Catholic. There is tragedy in the book, but it ends on a note of hope. The writer handles her story with a fine distinction and sincerity, and her Roman scenes are depicted with the intimate knowledge which has been an attractive feature of so many of her previous novels.

A Delightful and Original First Novel

Jenny Pilcher

By L. GRANT

The life of Jenny, a servant girl, is by no means an easy subject, but is treated with simplicity, sincerity and a high degree of art, and the result is a most delightful story. Jenny and her parents live in a slum. She goes as a nurse to the house of an artist, Mr. Thorne, who paints her, and the picture is a success at the Academy. Mrs. Thorne cannot appreciate her husband's art, whereas Jenny idealises Thorne and loves his pictures. Their marriage is at length rendered possible, and a story of unusual charm and with many passages of real pathos and beauty ends in their happiness.

Miss Brandt : Adventuress

By MARGERY H. LAWRENCE

This is a thrilling narrative of the duel of wits between a detective and a young and beautiful adventuress who moves in the highest circles of society. The story of how Miss Brandt falls in love, but nevertheless cannot resist using her lover as an unconscious tool to aid her in robbery, and of the progress and the final result of the duel with the detective, is one of fascinating interest.

Can These Things Be ?

By CECILIA HILL

Author of "Wings Triumphant," "Stone Walls," etc.

A fresh and charming story in which the main characters are a young girl and a blinded officer, whom she accompanies as nurse with his mother on a pilgrimage to Lourdes. During the war Mary Veronica has been awarded undeservedly a medal for bravery. To her horror she discovers that her patient was a witness of the cowardly act she now bitterly regrets. True love at last moves her to confess the truth to him, and an attractive story, unfolded with skill and discernment, ends happily for both.

The Beauty of Martha By NELLIE L. McCLUNG

Author of "Purple Springs," "Sowing Seeds in Danny," etc.

The writer possesses a real grip on the fundamentals of life, and the quaint humour, clever characterisation and genuine pathos which distinguish her novels are rapidly gaining for her among her English readers the vast popularity which she has so deservedly attained in Canada. "The Beauty of Martha" continues the life story of Pearl Watson, the delightfully human Irish-Canadian girl, whose early life and influence were so charmingly described in "Sowing Seeds in Danny." Her experiences as she grows to womanhood and the unfailing energy with which she makes her numerous family transform their much neglected farm are the main incidents of a fascinating story, simply and convincingly told.

Like Any Other Man

By HELEN PROTHERO LEWIS

Author of "As God Made Her," "The Silver Bridge,"

"Love and the Whirlwind," etc.

This original and dramatic story tells of a romantic and imaginative girl, Delilah Prymm, who takes the place of an unwilling bride and is married under her name to Derek Drinan, a man suffering from shell shock, who would forfeit an inheritance under his uncle's will if not married to his cousin by a certain date. The wedding over, Delilah disappears. Drinan regains health and, discovering the trick played upon him, vows vengeance against the unknown girl, if ever he finds her. The account of his search for Delilah is full of humour. Tragedy stalks very near when Drinan's search is successful, but he finally proves himself "like any other man," and yields to the seductions of a charming and most amusing Delilah. The story is pleasing and skilfully developed, moving briskly to its appointed end.

By a New Novelist of Unusual Charm.

Vine Leaves

By LENORE van der VEER

The "Vine Leaves" are the memoirs of a wealthy young woman, inspired by the adventures of a young French runaway couple, who have sought a temporary refuge near by. How they live in terror of their German landlady, threatened by her infamous brother, how the youth is fetched home by his angry father, but soon followed, through the aid of their sympathetic chronicler, by his loving and still unmarried bride are the main themes of a singularly engaging story, written delicately and with sympathy and which should find a welcome among a wide class of readers.

The Pointed Tower

By VANCE THOMPSON

Author of "Spinners of Life," etc.

This is a detective story with the scene laid in Paris. Though the author is not a Frenchman, he has managed to capture some of the true spirit of Gaboriau, first and best of tellers of detective stories. His plot is to the last degree ingenious and logical, his characters have human stuff in them and are not mere accessories to his plot, while he writes with a buoyancy, ease, and sprightliness that prevent his puzzle becoming ever wearisome or the details of his hidden crime sordid. His detective, Mr. Guelpa, is an entirely original and entertaining figure, and it can safely be promised that every reader who takes up this fascinating story will remain completely engrossed till he has solved the mystery.

An Exciting Story of India by a New Writer.

The Holders of the Gate By HELEN M. FAIRLEY

A realistic story of love, intrigue and fighting on an Indian frontier station. Vivian Laitham, beautiful and enigmatic, and Dick Trevor, a writer, have travelled thither together, she to rejoin her husband, who is in the regiment which Colonel Ross, married to Dick's sister, commands. There is also a German spy who has a hold on Vivian while, without the fort, a loyal Rajah, his infamous cousin and a fierce Ranee each fight for their own hands. The writer possesses a first-hand knowledge of the scenes and characters which she describes, as well as a distinct gift of vivid narrative, and her book affords her readers a valuable insight into the conditions of life so often prevalent on the outposts of our Empire.

"Can stand beside 'King Solomon's Mines' and not fear comparison."

City of Wonder

By E. CHARLES VIVIAN

Author of "Passion Fruit," "The Woman Tempted Me," etc.

"A wonderful book," writes Mr. Eden Phillpotts in a letter to the author, "that can stand beside 'King Solomon's Mines' and not fear comparison." The story of the three adventurers who crossed the trembling bridge and came, by way of the "place where ghosts chase women," to overcome the woman who ruled monkeys, and in the end to find the "City of Wonder" is indeed one such as is rarely told. The love idyll of Princess Eve among the hidden wonders of Kir-Asa is, perhaps, the greatest feature in a powerful story of romance and adventure;

A Daughter of the Stars : A Romance.

By ALEXANDER MACFARLAN

Author of "The Curtain," etc.

The central idea of this unusually powerful story is worked out with great dramatic instinct. The scene is set in an island off Spain where superstition and mysticism naturally flourish. Miguela, a beautiful foundling, comes as companion to a Spanish marquesa, who believes her a saint endowed with mysterious powers. She possesses a miraculous gift of healing, and all, including herself, become convinced of her divine origin. Tragedy comes in with mortal love and the end is remorseless in its dramatic intensity. The characters throughout are drawn with astonishing vividness. The writer's clear, concise style enhances the profound interest of this romantic story.

To the Adventurous

By E. NESBIT.

Author of "The Red House," "The Lark," "New Poems," etc.

E. Nesbit is admittedly mistress of the difficult art of the short story. In "To the Adventurous," she strikes a new note. "Adventures," she tells us, "are to the adventurous," and the adventures are drawn for us from all the varied fields of life and love. The book will not make you afraid to go to bed, but you are likely to sit up till the small hours because you cannot lay it down. Each story in its own way is delightful.

A Powerful First Novel of Love and Misadventure.

Two Fools and a Paradise By FRANK FOWELL

This is a first novel, and treats in a manner both original and artistic of the relations and doings of a married couple—the husband totally absorbed in money making, the wife, neglected, turning to flirtation. He detects her, enforces a confession, but seeks no divorce. They start on a voyage, and shipwrecked on a desert island learn again to love. They are rescued, but the subsequent happenings of their lives in London, in which love adventures, clairvoyance and the claims of real life play their parts, are disillusioning. The characters both of husband and wife are cleverly conceived and realistically portrayed, and their doings enlist the reader's sympathy and hold it to the end.

The Red Vulture

By FREDERICK SLEATH

Author of "Sniper Jackson," "A Breaker of Ships," etc.

"The Red Vulture" is an exciting story of the adventures of a young gentleman whose career as a burglar is unknown to anyone. While making an entry through a cellar wall into a house, where he believes jewels are to be found, he is amazed by the sight of what appears to be a gorgeously equipped Eastern temple. He becomes acquainted with its actual character and its inmates, and his subsequent escapades, in which love plays a part, provide sustained and thrilling entertainment.

Dust of the Desert

By ROBERT WELLES RITCHIE

Author of "Trails to Two Moons," etc.

The scene of this powerful romance is laid in Mexico. The hero, a young American, woos the beautiful Irish girl, whose ancestors have been for three centuries desert dwellers, but has a rival in her Spanish cousin. She is eager to restore the pearl necklace which the evil "Red One" has stolen from the figure of the Virgin, and strange and tragic are the adventures of the true-hearted lovers before these jewels are discovered and they are free to seek their happiness in the life before them.

Friday to Monday

By WILLIAM GARRETT

Author of "The Secret of the Hills," etc.

The title of this engrossing story denotes the week-end visit which Sir Richard Montague, all unsuspecting, paid to the country house of an old friend. There he finds mystery, false impersonation, robbery and dangerous adventures depicted with a vigour and resourceful imagination which holds the reader's attention to an eminently satisfactory conclusion.

Their Chosen People

By Mrs. C. A. NICHOLSON

Author of "Martin, Son of John."

A Jewish family and their relation to Gentiles is the central interest. The characters, notably Conrad and his sister, aunt, and grandmother De Costro, are convincingly depicted. The story is written with knowledge, sympathy, and insight. It possesses therefore an attractive and moving quality quite uncommon in books or stories dealing with modern Jewish life.

Ponga Bay : A Story of old New Zealand

By SOPHIE OSMOND

Author of "An Australian Wooing," etc.

This vivid story of forest life in New Zealand before the Maori War admirably fulfils a worthy mission—that of enlightening readers throughout the British Empire on the life and early struggles of the first settlers in that beautiful country. A young Scottish officer, disowning his marriage, seeks to retrieve his lost honour among the early colonists. A friend goes with him and works as a missionary among the Maoris. Six years later Helen joins her false husband with their child. He repents and they marry again, but he is killed in a native rising. The writer tells her story of romantic adventures with power and sincerity, and her descriptions of the surroundings are glowing with local colour.

Desert Dust

By EDWIN L. SABIN

Author of "How Are You Feeling Now?" etc.

A powerful adventure-story of perils evaded and love in the end triumphant. The hero, a cultured young American, travels westward to "Benton," a desert township in the making and haunt of ruffians. During the last stage of his journey a beautiful girl has been his companion. Thieves steal his baggage and in a gambling den a murderous villain, the girl's husband, robs him of all his money. He takes a job as a teamster. The girl, deserted, appears and appeals to him in vain, but with an untimely success to the Mormon captain of the team. The writer possesses a fertile imagination and a rare power of vivid description which holds the reader throughout.

A Delightful Historical Romance by a New Novelist.

Quest of Youth

By J. G. SARASIN

This stirring romance opens in Paris on the eve of the Massacre of St. Bartholomew and the entrusting of the heroine by her dying sister to the care of a stranger. He loyally fulfils his promise, and for many years Odette is all unknowing supported by the generosity of her mysterious benefactor, whose identity is cleverly concealed until almost the end of the book. In his portraying of incidents and characters of the time, the author has achieved a notable success, skilfully blending love, fighting and intrigue into a spirited narrative.

The Blue-Eyed Manchu By ACHMED ABDULLAH

Author of "Bucking the Tiger," "The Undying Race," etc.

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The lucky individual of the title of this absorbing novel is a demobilised officer whose advertisement requesting this modest sum receives to his amazement an anonymous but favourable reply—on a certain condition. What this condition was and how it was fulfilled form the subject of Mr. Newman's entertaining and crisply-written novel, in which the reader will find enough thrills, humour and adventures, to hold his interest firmly from start to finish.

Morry

By ROBERT ELSON

Author of "Maxa," etc.

This original, cleverly conceived and well written story describes the career of a great lawyer. The reader is admitted behind the scenes, participates in the legal struggles which are stepping-stones to honour and high position, and feels the thrill when success and failure hang in the balance. Interwoven with the dramatic episodes, in which figure men and women of all classes, from a society beauty to a poor labourer, is the story of the lawyer's inner life, a story of love and friendship, of misunderstandings and loneliness, and self-sacrifice rewarded at last.

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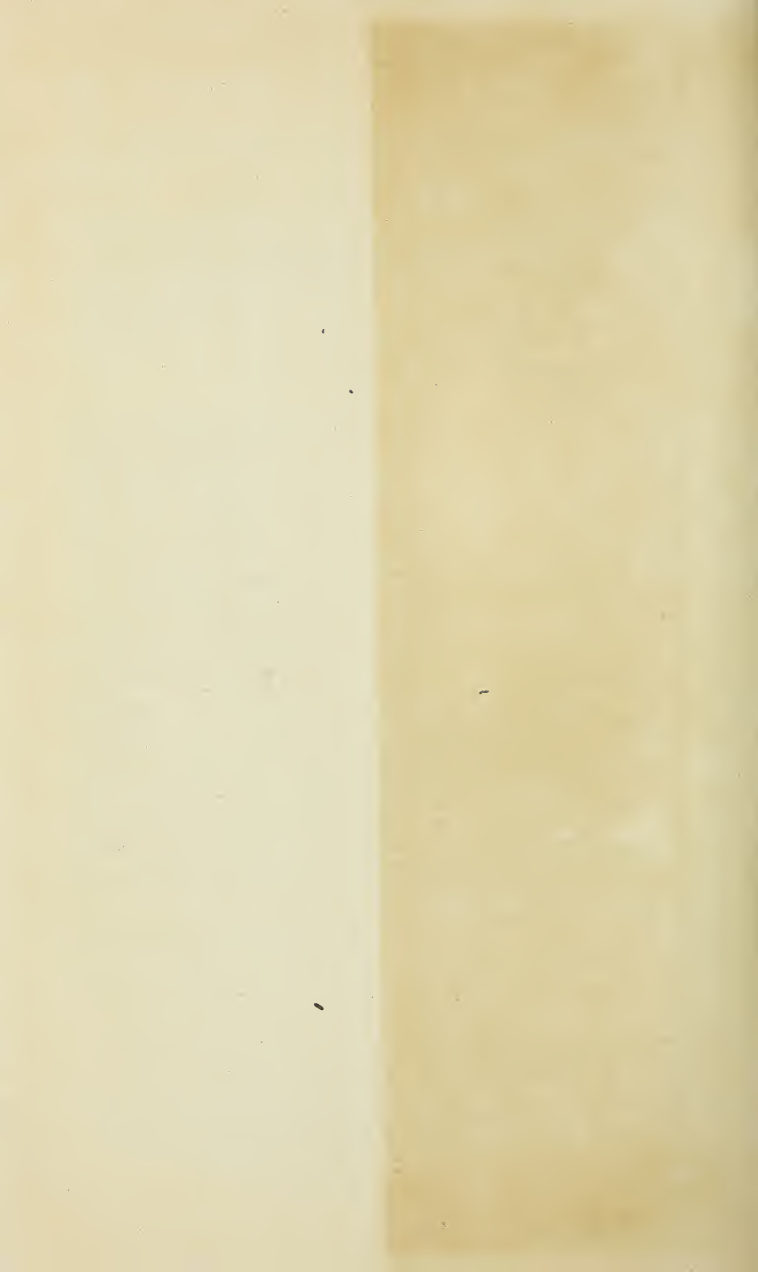
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